

The Origin of the Way of the Cross

During the whole of the scene which we have just described, the Mother of Jesus, with Magdalen and John, had stood in a recess in the forum: they were overwhelmed with the most bitter sorrow, which was but increased by all they heard and saw. When Jesus was taken before Herod, John led the Blessed Virgin and Magdalen over the parts which had been sanctified by his footsteps. They again looked at the house of Caiphas, that of Annas, Ophel, Gethsemani, and the Garden of Olives; they stopped and contemplated each spot where he had fallen, or where he had suffered particularly; and they wept silently at the thought of all he had undergone. The Blessed Virgin knelt down frequently and kissed the

ground where her Son had fallen, while Magdalen wrung her hands in bitter grief, and John, although he could not restrain his own tears, endeavoured to console his companions, supported and led them on. Thus was the holy devotion of the 'Way of the Cross' first practised; thus were the Mysteries of the Passion of Jesus first honoured, even before that Passion was accomplished, and the Blessed Virgin, that model of spotless purity, was the first to show forth the deep veneration felt by the Church for our dear Lord. How sweet and consoling to follow this Immaculate Mother, passing to and fro, and bedewing the sacred spots with her tears. But, ah! Who can describe the sharp, sharp sword of grief which then transfixed her tender soul? She who had once borne the Saviour of the world in her chaste womb, and suckled him for so long,—she who had truly conceived him who was the Word of God, in God from all eternity, and truly God,—she beneath whose heart, full of grace, he had deigned to dwell nine months, who had felt him living within her before he appeared among men to impart the blessing of salvation and teach them his heavenly doctrines; she suffered with Jesus, sharing with him not only the sufferings of his bitter Passion, but likewise that ardent desire of redeeming fallen man by an ignominious death, which consumed him.



In this touching manner did the most pure and holy Virgin lay the foundation of the devotion called the Way of the Cross; thus at each station, marked by

the sufferings of her Son, did she lay up in her heart the inexhaustible merits of his Passion, and gather them up as precious stones or sweet-scented flowers to be presented as a choice offering to the Eternal Father in behalf of all true believers. The grief of Magdalen was so intense as to make her almost like an insane person. The holy and boundless love she felt for our Lord prompted her to cast herself at his feet, and there pour forth the feelings of her heart (as she once poured the precious ointment on his head as he sat at table); but when on the point of following this impulse, a dark gulf appeared to intervene between herself and him. The repentance she felt for her faults was immense, and not less intense was her gratitude for their pardon; but when she longed to offer acts of love and thanksgiving as precious incense at the feet of Jesus, she beheld him betrayed, suffering, and about to die for the expiation of her offences which he had taken upon himself, and this sight filled her with horror, and almost rent her soul asunder with feelings of love, repentance, and gratitude. The sight of the ingratitude of those for whom he was about to die increased the bitterness of these feelings tenfold, and every step, word, or movement demonstrated the agony of her soul.

The heart of John was filled with love, and he suffered intensely, but he uttered not a word. He supported the Mother of his beloved Master in this her first pilgrimage through the stations of the Way of the Cross, and assisted her in giving the example of that devotion which has since been practised with so much fervour by the members of the Christian Church.