

## THE WORDS ON THE CROSS.

SERMON BY REV. CANON BRUCHESI

An Eloquent, Touching and Instructive  
Oration, Delivered on Good Friday  
Night, in the Cathedral  
Chapel.

Nothing would afford us greater pleasure than to be able to give our readers a full report of the magnificent sermon preached on last Friday evening, by the Rev. Canon Bruchesi, of the Archbishop's palace; but for many good reasons such is impossible. In the first place the reverend gentleman spoke in French, and no English translation could render—in any way exactly—the elegant diction and forcible expressions of the speaker; in the second place we were so affected by the uninterrupted attraction of the clear cut and touchingly conveyed ideas, that it was out of the question to attempt even to take notes, moreover, the chapel was too dark to use pencil and paper, besides the sermon was never written, but spoken extemporaneously; and finally we believe that unless a person were present and heard it as delivered, no adequate conception of its effects could be formed from a mere synopsis or newspaper report. However, let us strive, by dint of forcing our memory, to recall a few of the most striking passages. There was a practical side to every point taken, and no matter how coldly we may convey the ideas of the preacher, still they should not be allowed to die upon the air, as the music that was heard or the hymns that were sung. By way of comment, we merely state—and perhaps no better and truer praise could we bestow—that we were inwardly touched by that eloquent discourse upon the "Words on the Cross," so much so that even when the language and form are forgotten, the substance of the remarks must long remain engraven upon our memory.

The text was taken from the Gospel of St. Matthew, chapter xxvii, verse 34: *Vere filius Dei erat iste*; "Truly this man was the Son of God." It was the centurion, as he left the scene on Calvary, and looking back, while the earth quaked and all nature manifested its horror, who cried out—pointing to the crucified—"truly this man was the Son of God." The most disinterested and most wonderful testimony to the Divinity of Christ that could have been pronounced. Nearly two thousand years ago that scene took place, and the story of the event has been transmitted down the ages. The millions of faithful flock into the basilicas and chapels of the world, on Good Friday, and they ask of the priests to speak to them about that death. "Tell us," they say, "the oft-repeated story of His death, for we love to hear it and we glory in it." The one who has had the misfortune to have a relative or ancestor who suffered execution, blushes at the mention of the name, and shudders when he hears an allusion to the disgrace of his family. Yet, no man ever suffered a more ignominious death than Christ, and still hundreds upon hundreds of thousands, in all lands, in all ages, have gloried in being ranked amongst his followers, have exulted in the story of His sufferings, have gone into the temples—as do all who are present here to-night—and have begged of the priests, His anointed envoys, to speak to them of Jesus crucified. To-night, then, in answer to that appeal, I come to talk to you of a death scene, to tell you of an execution, to repeat the story of a sacrifice. And, Great God! what a death! The death of the Cross; the execution of Innocence; the sacrifice of a Divinity! Without pausing to contemplate the scenes of the passion, the details of which are read in the gospel, we will at once ascend the rocks of Golgotha, and there listen to the words that Christ pronounced upon the gibbet of the Cross. We will hearken to them and draw from them the lessons they were intended to convey.

When at the age of twelve Christ went into the temple and held converse with the doctors of the law, they declared that never before had they heard such wisdom as fell from His lips. It was said of Him, when He preached during His public life, that "no man had ever spoken as that man." True it is that His words were always fraught with

superhuman wisdom and import; but, above all, when we reflect upon what He said while hanging to the cross, most assuredly can we say, "no man has ever spoken as that man." It was there on His deathbed of suffering that Jesus expressed His last will; it was there, in the midst of infinite agony that he pronounced words as precious as they were few. After all the tortures he had gone through, the mockery, the blows, the contempt, the misery, surrounded by His executioners and the weeping group, of which one was His mother, we would expect that to the agonizing and loving ones His first words would be addressed. Not so. It was of His persecutors that He spoke, for them He raised His voice. Suspended between earth and sky, and looking up to His Father in Heaven, Christ addressed the Eternal. That Father was the God of all justice; the one who caused fire from heaven to descend upon the persecutors of His prophet, who sent wild beasts from the desert to devour those who ridiculed His servant, who caused the earth to open and swallow the menaces of His anointed, who warned the people to beware of laying hands upon His Christ; to that Father the suffering Victim was about to speak. Was it to call upon the Father to crush with the thunders of His wrath the unhappy executioners, the miserable Jews? Not at all. The first words of Christ on the cross were words of pardon. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Ah! you who await to-night the moment when you shall come to kiss the feet of the Divine Saviour, harken to the words—"forgive them." Have you not some secret hatred in your heart, do you not cherish some vengeance for wrongs inflicted; is there not some old score that you keep against those who have injured you? What, oh! what are your injuries to those that Christ underwent, and yet He cried out "Father, forgive them." Before you kiss his pierced feet to-night soften your hearts, and recalling all the wrongs you have suffered, unite your voices with that of Christ, and as He addressed His Father, asking of Him to forgive the wickedness of the worst of persecutors, do you address Him and say "Christ forgive us as we forgive them who have injured us."

For a time in silent agony hung the Redeemer of mankind. Suspended between two robbers, He looked down upon the world for which He was about to die. He had asked His Father to forgive His persecutors; but He saw down the vista of ages each one of us, and He beheld the crimes of the millions yet unborn; and for all of them did He ask pardon. He had come to save not to destroy; His mission was one of mercy, not of vengeance. The robber hanging at His right, turned to the Saviour and said: "Lord, remember me when Thou art in Thy Kingdom." Thy Kingdom! Mark the words! The culprit expiating his sins knew that Jesus was a King, and that His Kingdom was not of this world. The Jews, in mockery, had written it over the Cross, "Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews;" but the thief recognized, in the moment of grace and faith, that the dying Saviour was not only King of the Jews, but King of the Heavens and the Earth. He asked to be remembered by the dying One, when in His Kingdom. What answer did Christ make? Did he say that He would remember the converted thief; did He promise to think of the one who had asked for pardon? No, He spoke as a King, as the Son of God, and His words were the sweetest that could have fallen from lips. To the dying thief He said: "This day, thou shalt be with me in Paradise." What an answer to the one who believed and trusted in Him! "This very day," to be with Christ in His eternal Kingdom. Had Judas, Limeself, who sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver, had the grace and courage to have asked for pardon, he would have received it. In those words of the expiring Saviour to the penitent thief, we hear a sermon of love and mercy. In them is a promise to each of us, that we have but to go to the Divine Redeemer and beg of Him to remember us in His Kingdom, and we are certain of more than we ask. As He opened the gates of Paradise to the expiring culprit, so does He daily fling them open for the sinners of the world. He but awaits our turning towards Him, to joyfully promise that with Him we shall be in Paradise.

Christ had given all that He could possibly bestow: He had given His body to be tortured, His heart to be lacerated, His soul to be agonized, His blood to be

poured out till the last drop, and there remained nothing more that He possessed and with which He could part. Ah! Yes, there was still something more. He had His mother. There she stood at the foot of the Cross, suffering tortures that no woman before ever underwent. Beside her the Beloved Disciple. Here there was the greatest gift that Christ could bestow upon us. He who loved to call the First Person, "Father," found next in sweetness the name of "Mother," when applied to the one who gave Him the blood that he was shedding for the world. Yet, in order to suffer every conceivable anguish, of mind as well as of body, of heart as well as of soul, He refrained from calling the beloved one "Mother." In giving her to the children of men, and in giving them to her, Christ said: "Woman behold thy Son." There and then did Mary give spiritually birth to each of us; there and then we became her special care, her children for all time. To complete His sacrifice the Saviour left us not only His own body and blood, but also His Holy Mother. She whom the ages called Blessed, she who is the purest of created beings, became the protectress and mother of the human family. Therefore, to-night, when we express our love for Christ, we must add to it our love for Mary; when we ask pardon of Him, we must ask it also of His and our Mother; when we reflect upon His sufferings, we must couple with them the agonies of the Virgin Immaculate; when we invoke His Holy Name, we must ask of her to be our advocate at the throne of glory. For truly she is our Mother: from the cross Christ left her to us, and gave us to her.

The mighty sacrifice was apparently completed; but yet the law was to be fulfilled to the letter and the predictions of the prophets to be carried out to the very minutest detail. It was foretold that the Messiah should drink gall and vinegar. The hour was fast approaching when all was to be over, and yet this little—seemingly insignificant still most important—act had to be performed. In the burning fever of His agony Christ cried out "I thirst." The soldier, taking a sponge placed vinegar and gall upon it, and with a long stick handed it to the dying Saviour. It touched His lips; He drank of it; the word of the prophet had been fulfilled. But apart from that physical thirst of which Christ complained there was another drought far more burning. He looked down the centuries and each and all of us passed before His vision. He thirsted for our souls, for our love, for our faith, for our gratitude, for our salvation; He thirsted for the happiness of the human race. It is for us to contemplate that fearful agony of a parched and fevered victim, expiring for our iniquities and thirsting for our attachment and devotion. How often have we not handed him gall and vinegar, a mockery in the hour of His sufferings? Before kissing His feet to-night let us resolve that the beloved Saviour of mankind shall no longer thirst in vain for our souls.

After a pause Christ turned His eyes towards Heaven, and in an agony that only the Infinite can comprehend, He gave expression to the most extraordinary and astounding words that had yet fallen from His Divine lips. He had been betrayed by Judas, abandoned by His disciples, forsaken by His friends; left alone with the full weight of all the crimes of men—past and future—upon His shoulders and He seemed to have drunk the chalice of expiation even to its dregs. Could there be anything left that He had not done; could there be aught more that He might give up; could there be a torture, physical or spiritual, that He had not undergone? It is computed that at the pillar He had received five thousand lashes; He was one mass of wounds; not a drop of blood remained in His body and not a spot—as big as a pin's head—upon all that body was unmarked. He had been tortured mentally until apparently nothing more was left to add to the load. Yet He had accepted the crimes of man; these crimes being against an Infinite God, they required an Infinite power to expiate them and satisfy the Divine Justice. As God He could not suffer; but in the mysterious union with the human, which can suffer, Christ was enabled to give infinite satisfaction to the Almighty. It was in that fearful moment of untold misery, when all had fled from Him, and His enemies seem to triumph, that He cried out, in almost what might be called an agony of despair

"My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken me?" Of these words I cannot tell the meaning; but the lesson they teach is one to be taken to heart. How often have we not found ourselves abandoned by the world, forsaken by our friends, discarded by our relatives, insulted, envied, hated and left to the mercy of the cold and careless? Yet, even then, when our loneliness is unbearable, our affliction most cruel, our hopes blasted, our friends fled and our future a blank, we have the great example of Calvary's Victim before us,—who, even in His Divine assurance, felt as though the Father had forsaken Him completely. To that last extreme of misery did Christ allow Himself to be brought, in order that we might feel that there is no condition in life so bad, so abandoned, so hopeless but that it might be worse; and therein let us find courage in all our afflictions.

The last words upon the Cross, before the dying expression, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit," were perhaps the most solemn ever spoken on earth, *Consummatum est*—"It is consummated." The work of redemption was done. Every article of the Law had been fulfilled. There remained nothing more for the suffering Victim to do—but to expire. It seems to me that never could Christ have spoken words of greater personal relief. From the cradle in the stable to the flight into exile, through all the weary years of poverty and privation, during the period of labor and the time of passion, the Son of God had suffered all, and more than all, that it is possible for humanity to undergo. And all that was over. He had fulfilled His mission. The future was to be one of glory eternal, of repose unending. *Consummatum est*—"it is all over"—all over with sorrow, torture, misery, sin, or rather the penalties of sin. It was a consummation of Infinite Justice: for, as I explained, it required an Infinite power of suffering to expiate the sins committed against an Infinite Being. It was a consummation of human wickedness and malice; because all that the evil ingenuity of man could devise, in the way of torture and suffering, had been called into action and put into practice by the enemies, persecutors and executioners of Christ. It was a consummation of Divine love, for it absorbed all that a God could do for the salvation and regeneration of a fallen creature. It was the consummation of a work that only the union of the Divine with the Human could have accomplished. The work of Redemption was completed, and we will all go now to the feet of the Saviour and ask of Him the grace to participate fully in the merits of the great event of Good Friday. But before you come to touch with your lips the pierced feet of the Crucified, I would ask you to pause a moment and question your own hearts.

Amongst the Jews it was a custom that whenever the body of a murdered man was found on a person's land it was carried into the public place and exposed. Each one of the relatives and neighbors of the one on whose property it was found was obliged to pass by the corpse, and holding his hand over it, to swear that he was innocent of the blood of that man. As you approach, to-night, to kiss the dead Saviour, the victim of the most barbaric and terrible of executions, how many of you can place your hand upon that figure, and say, "I am innocent of the death of this Just One?" I for one cannot; nor do I believe can any one here to-night. Then it we, through our sins, are guilty of the blood and sufferings of the Redeemer, we must come with contrition, compunction, humility and sincerity, and striking our breasts, acknowledge our sins, and ask for that pardon which Christ gave to the penitent thief. He bestowed it from the cross, and in it we all shall participate.

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