10-3-1944

Lenten and Easter Meditation: Voices of the Passion: The Seven Words from the Cross: The Third Word, 1944

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Recommended Citation
Kretzmann, O.P., "Lenten and Easter Meditation: Voices of the Passion: The Seven Words from the Cross: The Third Word, 1944" (1944). O.P. Kretzmann Collection. 120.
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THE SEVEN WORDS FROM THE CROSS

THE THIRD WORD

Woman Behold Thy Son! Behold Thy Mother!

Several young people were taking part in a discussion of religion at an institute conducted by a young people's organization. Suddenly a young man in the group said: "It seems to me that very often you preachers talk about things you do not understand." There was much truth in the young man's statement. Often the preachers must speak about things which he does not fully understand. In fact, whenever he speaks of God, he is reaching up to the heights and down into the depths of mysteries beyond human wisdom.

This is especially true of the seven words of the Cross. The first two words sweep across heaven and earth, time and eternity. The first marches upward toward heaven and transforms the Cross into the flaming altar of the world's High Priest: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." The second transforms Calvary into the vestibule of heaven and the open door to eternity: "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

The third word, however, remains with us here on earth. It was probably spoken quietly. The Head crowned with thorns was bowed down to the earth where we must live. It is perhaps a little nearer to our full understanding. The feverish eye of our Lord have searched the crowd from some familiar face. Suddenly he sees a few figures who are near and dear to Him. All except one are women. For a moment His eyes rest on them and here, at the very center of the world's history, the Son of God becomes once more the Son of Mary. Suspended between earth which had openly rejected Him and Heaven which had seemingly forsaken Him, He remembers His mother, Mary of Nazareth. He bends His head down to her: "Woman behold Thy Son! Behold Thy Mother!"

All Christian mothers will understand these words better than I. Perhaps
Mary's thoughts went back to that silent and holy night when she had first held her Child in her arms. Perhaps she remembered the golden days of His childhood when He grew in grace and wisdom before God and man. Perhaps she remembered Simeon's dark and ominous words: "Yes, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also." Now she began to understand what he meant. The thorns around the prow of her Son were a circle of flame about her head. The pain of her motherhood was a sword in her heart. All this He sees from the Cross! He sees the dark and lonely years which lie before her. His whisper comes to her: "Woman behold thy son! Behold thy mother."

There are some important lessons for us in this third word from the Cross. Here our Saviour reaches down into the small and ordinary things of life. He is making His last will and testament. Here on Calvary with the winds of God's anger sweeping over His soul and all the sorrow of the world centered in His broken heart, He remembers His mother. If this word had never been spoken, we should not have missed it. Our human understanding did not expect it. And yet there it is! In a flash we see the magnificent inclusiveness and universality of the love of God. It reaches down and away into all problems of life and living. The Christian religion is not only a religion of great churches, chanting choirs, and soaring cathedrals. It is a religion of the home and kitchen; of the little things of life. There is nothing on earth which it does not touch.

On the Cross our Saviour remembered His mother. Just so He remembers today the businessman who brings a problem to Him, the housewife who is worried and anxious, the child who holds up a broken finger. His love storms the gates of Heaven and pours itself into every nook and corner of life.

Here is our great and lasting comfort. We may have come to this church worried and anxious. We may have a problem which does not appear important to the world. We may be worrying about something which affects us alone. All these by the magnificent and intimate power of the Cross we can bring to Him who on Calvary remembered His mother. He will also remember us forever!