

CATHOLIC BY DESIGN

Meditations on the Sorrowful Mysteries

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Catholic By Design

Meditations on the Sorrowful Mysteries

A companion to *Catholic By Design: God's Blueprint for His Church from Eden to the Garden of Revelation*.

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A Word Before You Begin

“On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his History, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun.”

— Julius Africanus (3rd c.), *Chronography*, citing the historian Thallus (writing c. AD 50)

Creation itself suffered when its Creator was betrayed by the created — beaten, mocked, scourged, crowned, and crucified on a spring afternoon around AD 33. The eerie darkness that fell over the land that afternoon was remembered even outside the Church. The pagan historian Thallus, as Africanus reports him, writing within about twenty years of the crucifixion, recorded it — and tried to explain it away as an ordinary eclipse of the sun. We know this only because the third-century chronicler Julius Africanus preserves and answers him, giving us the vivid scene above and pointing out, rightly, that no eclipse can fall at Passover, when the moon is full. Jesus — God, who took upon Himself flesh and dwelt among men (John 1:14), promised in Genesis 3:15 as THE ONLY remedy to the fall of mankind — was rejected and murdered by those who should have received Him as their Messiah. And so even creation itself cries out to God for mercy... as we also must do.

“Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’”

— Matthew 27:45–46

Most of us have prayed the Rosary a hundred times. We have said the words of the Sorrowful Mysteries so often that they can slide past us like scenery from a car window — the Agony, the Scourging, the Crowning, the Cross, the death. We know them. We love them. And

yet I wonder how many of us have ever stopped to ask the question that changed the way I pray them forever: what if every element of the passion, death, and resurrection of my Savior, Jesus, was intentional and specific? What if every one of these mysteries was *written* into salvation history centuries before Calvary?

That is the heart of Catholic By Design, and it is the heart of this little book. The Church — and the Cross at her center — is not improvised. It is not a story God made up as He went along. It is His eternal blueprint, drawn from the foundation of the world and foreshadowed from the garden of Eden. Nothing in the Passion of our Lord is arbitrary. Every wound, every step, every word from the cross is the deliberate fulfillment of something God set down in the Old Testament long before.

So here is my promise to you. Pray these five Sorrowful Mysteries slowly, and watch the Old Testament open up underneath each one. Watch Adam's curse, David's stripes, Abraham's wood, and Moses' law all gather onto a single set of shoulders. By the time you reach the fifth mystery, I think you will never hear "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" the same way again.

Let me give you the lens before we begin, because everything that follows depends on it.

A covenant, in the biblical sense, is not a contract. A contract is the exchange of goods; a covenant is the exchange of persons. It is the bond that makes a family. And from the very beginning, God has been binding Himself to His people through a series of covenants — with Adam, with Noah, with Abraham, with Moses, with David — each one mediated by a man who stood as a kind of priest, prophet, and king for his people, and each one pointing forward to the one Mediator who would gather them all into Himself.

Here is the part that should make you sit up. Every one of those covenants carried a burden. Adam's disobedience earned death and a cursed ground that brings forth thorns. David's royal covenant carried a clause of chastisement — "the stripes of the sons of men." Abraham was asked for his beloved son and the wood of sacrifice on a mountain. Moses wrote into the Law that a man hanged on a tree is "accursed by God." Adam's thorns, David's stripes, Abraham's wood, Moses' curse — four covenant burdens, scattered across a thousand years of Scripture.

And then, in a single afternoon, they all come due at once. On one set of shoulders. In one body. On one tree.

But there were five covenant mediators, not four — and the fifth one did not lay a burden on Calvary. Noah's covenant pointed somewhere else entirely. Where Adam's curse left thorns, David's left stripes, Abraham's left wood, and Moses' left a law that condemned the guilty, Noah's covenant left a picture: a vessel that bore a remnant of humanity safely through the waters of divine judgment and delivered them to new life on the other side. That vessel is a shadow of the true Ark of Salvation — the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, founded upon the Rock of St. Peter, and born from the water and blood that poured from Christ's pierced side (John 19:34).

St. Peter himself draws the line directly. The family that was "saved through water" in the days of Noah was not a historical footnote — it was a type, a foreshadowing pressed into the very fabric of Scripture for our sake:

“For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

— 1 Peter 3:18–21

The Ark did not carry its passengers because they were strong or numerous or worthy — it carried them because God said so, and because they were inside it. So it is with the Church, and with us.

When you read the Old Testament through that lens, the Passion stops looking like a tragedy that happened to Jesus and starts looking like a mission He walked into with His eyes open. Adam failed in a garden; the New Adam would not fail in a garden. Adam reached for a tree and brought death; the New Adam would be lifted onto a tree and bring life. The whole of it was foreseen, foreshadowed, and fulfilled — because, as I have said before and will say again, the cross is the answer to Genesis 3.

So let us walk the five Sorrowful Mysteries and watch the blueprint complete itself.

If this method feeds you — and I pray it does — there is a whole book waiting for you that traces this same blueprint from Eden all the way to the New Jerusalem. But that is for later. For now, take up your beads.



THE FIVE SORROWFUL MYSTERIES



I

The Agony in the Garden

FRUIT · SORROW FOR SIN, AND CONFORMITY TO GOD'S WILL

READ

"Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane... And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.'" — Matthew 26:36, 39

"And all the country wept aloud as all the people passed by, and the king crossed the brook Kidron... But David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered." — 2 Samuel 15:23, 30

THE MEDITATION

There is a garden at the beginning of the Bible and a garden near the end of the Gospels, and they are answering each other.

But before we get to Eden, look at David. When his own son Absalom drives him from his throne, the anointed king of Israel crosses the brook Kidron and climbs the Mount of Olives — barefoot, weeping, his head covered in grief, betrayed by his trusted counselor Ahithophel, who will hang himself before the story is done. A thousand years later the true Son of David crosses that same Kidron, climbs that same Mount of Olives, sweats His grief into the same ground, and is betrayed by His own Ahithophel, a friend named Judas who will also hang himself. The mountain had seen a king's grief before. Now it would see its King.

And underneath David is Adam. Gethsemane is the new Eden — and here the Last Adam faces the very thing the first Adam ran from. In the first garden, a man was asked to trust the Father and obey unto death, and he would not. He would not drink the cup. He hid. In this garden, the New Adam takes the cup in His own hands and lifts it. He drank the cup the Father had given Him — not because He was forced to, but because love does not flinch from the Father's will. Where

Adam said “no” in a garden, Christ says “not as I will, but as thou wilt.”



The angel and the chalice

FROM THE FATHERS

Cornelius à Lapse watches the whole arc of the agony — the unanswered prayers, the bloody sweat, the strengthening angel — and sees not a man collapsing but a man resolving:

“Christ had prayed the first and second time, but felt no help of God... permitting the agony to arise in Himself, He sweated blood. To overcome this, He prayed a third time more earnestly, teaching us that as temptation increases our prayers should increase equally. The angel therefore appeared to Him... whereupon He ceased to pray and to fear, and to grieve, and... He manfully prepared Himself for His Passion, and went forth of His own accord to meet Judas.” — à Lapse, Great Commentary on Luke 22:44

And the lesson he draws is one to carry into every garden of our own:
“The cross pursues those who fly from it, and flies those who seek for it.”



The Son of David — a king in exile

PONDER

- ✦ Adam hid; David wept and kept walking and didn't face his son; Christ knelt and said yes, taking on the passion He was born to endure. When the cup comes to me, which of the three am I?
- ✦ Our Lord's "yes" was not the absence of dread — He sweated blood. Am I prepared to keep watch with the Lord, or am I also asleep?
- ✦ Is there a cup in my life right now that I am still trying to set down?



The arrest in the garden

PRAY

Father, in the garden of decision Your Son said the words the first Adam would not: not as I will, but as thou wilt. Give us the grace to say them too — in our own gardens, in our own dark hours, when every part of us wants to hide. Let us not flee the cross, but go out of our own accord to meet it, certain that You will send Your angel in the hour we need Him most. Amen.

“Why is this, O my God? Thou dost so feel for and with me, in displaying Thyself Man, as that Thou seemest in a certain sort to forget that Thou art God. Fallen prostrate on Thy face Thou prayest, and, lo, Thy Sweat is turned to Blood trickling down upon the ground.”

— St. Anselm of Canterbury (attributed), *Meditations and Prayers*, Fifteenth Meditation



II

The Scourging at the Pillar

FRUIT · MORTIFICATION AND PURITY

READ

"Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged him." — John 19:1

"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities... and with his stripes we are healed." — Isaiah 53:5

"I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men." — 2 Samuel 7:14

THE MEDITATION

When God made His covenant with David, He promised an everlasting throne — but He wrote a hard clause into it. If the son of the covenant sinned, God would chasten him "with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men." That is the plain meaning of the words: the Father reserves the right to correct His royal sons, not to destroy them, but to amend them. It is a covenant of love with a rod attached.

Now stand at the pillar and watch what happens. The one sinless Son of David — the one royal Son who never broke the covenant, never earned a single stripe — steps under the lash and takes the rod meant for all the others. He bore the chastisement spoken of in the Davidic covenant. The correction owed to the covenant-breakers falls on the only One who kept it perfectly. The rod that was meant to warn becomes the rod that redeems.

And here Isaiah swings the hinge. The stripes that the covenant threatened as punishment become, in the prophet's mouth, the stripes that heal: "with his stripes we are healed." First the covenant warns of the rod; then the Son bears the rod; then the wounds of that rod become the medicine of the world. Nothing wasted. Nothing arbitrary. The whole design turning, blow by blow, toward our healing.



Bound to the pillar

FROM THE FATHERS

à Lapide reads the scourging as deliberate, substitutionary love, and he sends us straight to Isaiah himself:

“Now Christ wished in this way to atone for our evil lusts and manifold sins... He wished to obtain power and strength for all martyrs, in order to their enduring every kind of scourging. Compare Isaiah 53:5.” — à Lapide, Great Commentary on Matthew 27:26

And on Isaiah’s promise that “with his stripes we are healed,” à Lapide gives us one of the most beautiful images in all his commentary — the wounds as a medicine compounded from Christ’s own body:

“This is the precious medicine which Christ compounded — not from the juices of herbs, not from the fat of beasts, not from another’s body and blood, but from His own... for it is from this that the Sacraments have their power to justify and to heal the diseases of the soul: namely, from the bruise, the blood, and the wounds of Christ.” — à Lapide on Isaiah 53:5 (translated from the Latin)

He bore in silence, too. As à Lapide notes, under that horror “He uttered not a groan, gave no indication of pain, stood firm as a rock” — the King who opened not His mouth.



Under the lash

PONDER

- ✦ The covenant promised a rod to David’s house; the rod fell on the one Son who deserved none of it. Have I ever thanked Him for the stripes He took in my place?

- ✦ à Lapide calls His wounds a “precious medicine,” stored up in the Sacraments. When I go to Confession, to the Eucharist, do I come for the medicine — or out of habit?
- ✦ Where is God’s “rod of correction” at work in my own life, not to destroy me, but to amend me?

PRAY

Lord Jesus, sinless Son of David, You stepped under the rod that was meant for the rest of us and let it fall on You. By the stripes You bore in silence, heal what our sins have wounded; and let the medicine of Your blood, poured out in Your Sacraments, make whole every diseased corner of our souls. Amen.

“With the eyes of my mind I see Thee, O Lord Jesus, bound with such hard cords... Thanks be to Thy bonds, O good Jesus, which so powerfully burst asunder ours! ... I love the bonds of those scourges; for to them it was given to touch Thy most sacred Body, and they were profusely stained with Thy most pure Blood, O good Jesus!... As the vine to the stake, so is Christ bound to the pillar.”

— St. Bonaventure (attributed), *The Mystical Vine* (Vitis Mystica)



III

The Crowning with Thorns

FRUIT · MORAL COURAGE, AND THE REIGN OF CHRIST OVER THE
HEART

READ

"And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head, and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him they mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'" — Matthew 27:28–29

"Cursed is the ground because of you... thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you." — Genesis 3:17–18

THE MEDITATION

Of all the wounds of the Passion, this one carries its meaning on its surface — if you know where to look.

When Adam sinned, the ground itself was cursed, and the sign of that curse was the thorn. From that day, every thorn that ever tore a hand was a small, sharp reminder that something had gone wrong in the garden, that the earth no longer simply gave but now also wounded. The thorn is the badge of the fall. And the soldiers, laughing in that courtyard, not knowing for one moment what they were doing, gathered up that badge — the very sign of Adam's curse — and pressed it down onto the brow of the New Adam. In losing His life on the Cross, He took upon Himself the curse of Adam — the thorns.

Look hard at the mockery and you will see the truth hiding inside it. They meant to crown a false king. They actually crowned the true one. They reached for the most degrading thing they could find — the curse-sign of the cursed ground — and in God's design it became a diadem. What the ground brought forth against Adam, the New Adam wore for Adam. The thorns of Eden became the crown of the Redeemer.

And here is the wonder of it: He never takes that crown off. In the image of the Sacred Heart, the Heart is still encircled in thorns,

surmounted by a cross, burning with love. He wears our curse still, fused now to love, the crown that proves how far He was willing to go.



Hail, King of the Jews

FROM THE FATHERS

à Lapide gathers the Fathers on this scene, and they say plainly what the thorns mean. From Tertullian:

“What crown did Jesus wear? Of thorns... as a figure of those sins which the earth of our flesh hath brought forth unto us, but which the virtue of the Cross hath taken away.” — Tertullian, in à Lapide on Matthew 27:29

And from St. Jerome, the matter stated in a single line:

“In the crown of thorns He does away with the ancient curse.” — St. Jerome, in à Lapide on Matthew 27:29

à Lapide finds the same lesson back in Eden. Reading the curse of the ground with St. Basil, he hears the thorn speak: “As often as I see this flower, I am reminded of my sin — the sin for which the earth was condemned to bring forth thorns and thistles.” The thorn that accuses us in the garden becomes the crown that saves us on the Lord.



Behold the Man

PONDER

- ✦ Every thorn since Eden has been a reminder of the curse. He let them weave the whole curse into a crown. What does it mean that He wore my fall on His head?
- ✦ They crowned Him in mockery and accidentally told the truth. Where in my life do I treat the King as a joke and miss that He is reigning anyway?

✦ He still wears the thorns, fused to love. Will I let Him reign — crowned, not mocked — over my every thought?

PRAY

Lord Jesus, they pressed the curse of Eden onto Your brow and called it a joke, and You turned it into a crown. Reign in us — not in mockery but as Lord — over every thought, every fear, every corner we have kept from You. And when the thorns of this life tear at us, remind us that our King wore them first, and wears them still, for love. Amen.

"O sacred head, surrounded / By crown of piercing thorn! / O bleeding head, so wounded, / So shamed and put to scorn! / Death's pallid hue comes o'er Thee, / The glow of life decays; / Yet angel hosts adore Thee, / And tremble as they gaze.

In this Thy bitter passion, / Good Shepherd, think of me / With Thy most sweet compassion, / Unworthy though I be: / Beneath Thy cross abiding / For ever would I rest, / In Thy dear love confiding, / And with Thy presence blest."

— Arnulf of Louvain (traditionally St. Bernard), *Salve caput cruentatum* — "O Sacred Head, Surrounded"



IV

The Carrying of the Cross

FRUIT · PATIENCE, AND TAKING UP ONE'S CROSS

READ

“So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha.” — John 19:17

“And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together.” — Genesis 22:6

THE MEDITATION

Two thousand years before Calvary, a father and his beloved son climbed a mountain together. The father carried the fire and the knife; the son carried the wood — the wood for his own sacrifice — laid across his shoulders by his father’s own hands. The mountain was Moriah. The same ridge, the tradition tells us, on which a city called Jerusalem would one day stand, and outside its wall a hill called Calvary.

This is the Great Akedah, the binding of Isaac, and every detail of it points forward. On that mountain Abraham proved his fidelity to God; on that same mountain, God would one day prove His own by not sparing His own Son. The beloved son carries the wood of the offering up the slope — and so does the Beloved Son, the wood of the cross laid across His shoulders, climbing the same ridge to the same kind of altar.

There is a thread of wood running through the whole Bible, if you have eyes for it. There was the wood of the tree in Eden, which Adam reached for and which brought death. There is the wood of Isaac’s offering, carried in trembling faith. And there is the wood of the cross, which answers them both. Eden’s tree, Isaac’s bundle, Calvary’s beam — one line, drawn straight through salvation history by the hand of God.

But watch where the type breaks open. Isaac was spared. At the last moment the knife was stayed and a ram was caught in the thicket, offered in his place. This Son is not spared. There is no ram in the thornbush this time (crowned as it were with thorns), because this time the Son is the Lamb that God provides for Himself. The figure that began on Moriah is finished on Calvary.



Beneath the weight of the wood

FROM THE FATHERS

à Lapidé says it as plainly as it can be said. Commenting on the verse where Abraham lays the wood on Isaac:

“And he laid it upon Isaac — that he might be a type of Christ carrying His cross.” — à Lapidé on Genesis 22:6 (translated from the public-domain Latin)

And on the road itself, à Lapide hands us St. Augustine, who sees the hidden kingship in the humiliation:

“Ungodliness, as it looks on, laughs at a King bearing His cross of punishment instead of His sceptre: while the godly behold a King bearing the cross... which He would afterwards fix on the brows of kings.” — St. Augustine, in à Lapide on John 19:17

He does not spare us the weight of it, either: à Lapide describes the cross “covered all over with blood, wearied, and broken down,” one end on His shoulder and the other dragging the ground, reopening His wounds with every step. The wood that Adam fled, the Son of God carried.



Isaac carries the wood up Moriah

PONDER

- ✦ Isaac carried the wood of his own sacrifice and did not understand. How often am I asked to carry something up a hill I cannot yet see the top of? Do I have faith to see it through, even if I cannot see it?
- ✦ Isaac was spared; Christ was not. Sit with that for a moment — He took the place no ram could take.
- ✦ What is the wood laid across my shoulders right now? Am I dragging it in resentment, or carrying it behind the Son who carried His?



He falls beneath the cross

PRAY

Lord Jesus, You carried the wood of Your own offering up the very mountain where Isaac once carried his — but for You there was no ram in the thicket, because You are the Lamb the Father provided. Give us the strength to carry our own wood up our own hill, behind

You, without flinching and without complaint, trusting the Father who did not spare You for our sake. Amen.

“My most beloved Jesus, I embrace all the tribulations that Thou hast destined for me until death. I beseech Thee, by the merits of the pain Thou didst suffer in carrying Thy cross, to give me the necessary help to carry mine with perfect patience and resignation. I love Thee, Jesus, my love; I repent of having offended Thee. Never permit me to separate myself from Thee again. Grant that I may love Thee always, and then do with me what Thou wilt.”

— St. Alphonsus Liguori, *The Way of the Cross*, Second Station



V

The Crucifixion

FRUIT · PERSEVERANCE, AND THE SALVATION OF SOULS

READ

"And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him... Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last." — Luke 23:33, 46

"...for a hanged man is accursed by God." — Deuteronomy 21:23

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us — for it is written, 'Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree.'" — Galatians 3:13

THE MEDITATION

Here is where every thread we have followed is pulled tight in a single knot.

Moses, writing the Law, set down a specific and terrible sentence: a hanged man is accursed by God. A man executed for a capital crime and hung upon a tree falls under the curse of the Law itself. For centuries that verse sat in Deuteronomy like a sealed warning. And then He was nailed to a tree. Saint Paul, who knew the Law better than any of His accusers, quotes that very verse to explain the Crucifixion: Christ "redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us." On the tree, the sinless One becomes the curse — not because He earned it, but so that He could carry it away.

And now count what has gathered on this one cross. Adam's thorns are on His head. David's stripes are on His back. Abraham's wood is under His shoulders. Moses' curse is over His name. The grain of wheat has fallen into the ground, and it absorbed them all — became a curse for us, was cut off for us, bore the thorns for us, shed blood for us. Four covenants, four burdens, a thousand years apart in the writing, all coming due in one afternoon, on one hill, in one body. This is the blueprint completed — or so it might seem.

Because look again at the tree. The first tree, in Eden, was the tree by which death came — and at its gate the cherub stood with sword drawn to bar the way to the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:24). This tree is the Tree of Life itself, planted at last on Calvary. The guarding sword is sheathed now — for the same Lord had already said, in another garden, “Put your sword back into its place” (Matthew 26:52) — and the way Adam was driven from is thrown open at last. The fruit that hangs on this tree is the Lord Himself. The instrument of the curse becomes the instrument of the blessing. The wood that killed Adam saves his children.



At the foot of the cross

FROM THE FATHERS

à Lapide, reading Paul, makes the exchange explicit:

"Hence Christ, suspended on the cross, is called 'a curse' by the Apostle... because God transferred onto Christ the curses of the human race, namely when He took upon Himself for us the infamous and execrable death of the cross." — à Lapide on Deuteronomy 21:23 (translated from the public-domain Latin)

And he sees the two trees answer each other, in a line he draws from St. Jerome:

"He hung on the Cross, that the tree of shame might destroy the sin which we had committed through the tree of knowledge." — St. Jerome, in à Lapide on Galatians 3:13

So when our Lord breathes His last with "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit," à Lapide, with St. Athanasius, hears not a defeat but a gathering: "He commends all men to the Father, to be restored to life; for we are members of one body, which is the Church." The curse is carried off, and a Body is born.

POUNDER

- ✦ Moses wrote the sentence; Christ became it. He stepped under a curse with my name on it. Have I let that sink past my head and into my heart?
- ✦ Adam's thorns, David's stripes, Abraham's wood, Moses' curse — all on one cross. Does the Passion look arbitrary to me anymore, or does it look like a plan?
- ✦ The tree that killed Adam became the Tree of Life. What dead wood in my own life is God waiting to turn into life?

PRAY

Lord Jesus, on the tree You became the curse the Law had written, so that the curse would never again be ours. You gathered Adam's thorns and David's stripes and Abraham's wood and Moses' sentence onto Your own body and carried them all away. Let us never again live as the cursed, but as the redeemed; and give us the grace to persevere — all the way to the Tree of Life. Amen.

“And now, O Lord Jesus, my Redeemer, I adore Thee as very God; I believe in Thee, I hope in Thee, and I sigh after Thee with all possible desires; O, help my imperfection. I bow down my whole self before the glorious insignia of Thy Passion, wherewith Thou didst accomplish my salvation. The royal standard of Thy victorious Cross; in Thy Name, O Christ, do I adore it. The thorny diadem; the nails glistening with Thy Blood; the lance plunged into Thy sacred Side; Thy Wounds; Thy Blood; Thy Death; Thy Burial; Thy triumphant Resurrection, and Thy Glory,—O Christ, I suppliantly adore and glorify them.”

— St. Anselm of Canterbury, *Meditations and Prayers*, Ninth Meditation (“Of the Humanity of Christ”)



The Last Word from the Tree

A CLOSING MEDITATION

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

READ

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’” — Matthew 27:46

“All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.” — Psalm 22:27–28

(Our Lord quotes the opening line of Psalm 22 — the Vulgate and Douay-Rheims number it Psalm 21. The same psalm: it begins “why hast thou forsaken me” and ends in the conversion of the world.)

THE MEDITATION

For years that cry troubled me more than any other verse in the Passion. Was the King of Kings really crying out in despair, abandoned, broken, confused? I did not yet understand that He was quoting the first verse of Psalm 22 — and that a dying man does not recite poetry by accident.

Hear what every Jewish soul at the foot of that cross heard. Our Lord, hanging on the wood, prays aloud the opening line of the great messianic psalm — and in doing so He claims the whole of it. Psalm 22 opens in apparent desolation: a man scorned and mocked, his hands and feet pierced, his garments divided and gambled away. Every line of it was being fulfilled at Calvary, in real time, before the eyes of the crowd. He was not losing the thread. He was pointing to it: this ancient hymn is about Me, and it is happening now.

“But surely,” you might say, “forsaken means forsaken — the Father turned His back.” No, of course not. The Father never withdrew His presence, His love, or the union of the Word with that suffering flesh; the divinity was never severed from the body on the tree. What

the Father withheld was rescue and relief — He let His Son drink the cup to the very dregs. This is not my private theory. It is the settled teaching of the Church, and two of her greatest sons say it for us.

“When Christ complains of having been forsaken by God, we are not to understand that he was forsaken by the Second Person, or that there was a dissolution of the Hypostatic Union, or that he lost the favor and friendship of the Father; but he signifies to us that God permitted his human nature to undergo those dreadful torments... such complaints were only a declaration of his most bitter sufferings.” — St. Robert Bellarmine, Commentary on the Psalms, Psalm 21 (22)

And from the Gospel side, Cornelius à Lapide answers the charge of despair head-on:

“How can it be said that Christ ever despaired, when He said shortly afterwards, ‘Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit’? Christ therefore does not cry out as being forsaken by the Godhead... but only because the Father did not rescue Him from instant death.” — à Lapide, Great Commentary on Matthew 27:46

(One detail worth knowing: à Lapide never wrote on the Psalms. He and Bellarmine divided the Scriptures between them, and this psalm fell to Bellarmine — so the two great Jesuits here speak with one voice.)

Now see what He is really doing. To pray the first verse of Psalm 22 is to summon its last. And the psalm does not end in defeat — it ends in conquest: “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord... For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.” This is the Last Adam doing what the first refused to do. Adam stood in his garden in silence and let paradise slip through his fingers; the New Adam, in His garden-become-Calvary, opens His mouth, prays with His whole being, and turns what looks like defeat into the hinge of all history. He is not despairing. He is declaring.

PONDER

- ✦ When my own prayers seem to meet only silence, do I conclude that God has left me — or have I forgotten how the psalm ends?
- ✦ Our Lord met His darkest hour with Scripture on His lips. What word of God is hidden in my heart, ready for mine?
- ✦ The cross looked like the end. It was the throne. Where am I mistaking the ninth hour for the final word?

PRAY

My Lord Jesus, grant me the grace to stand at the foot of Your cross, like Your Blessed Mother, with courage unfailing. May she intercede for me, most especially in my darkest hour, whispering my name into Your Divine ear. May You hear her voice and grant her petition. Place Your psalm in our mouths and Your trust in our hearts — that we, like You and unlike the first Adam, would pray through the darkness to the dawn we cannot yet see, until all the ends of the earth remember and turn to You, O Lord, who are the way, the truth, and the life. Amen.



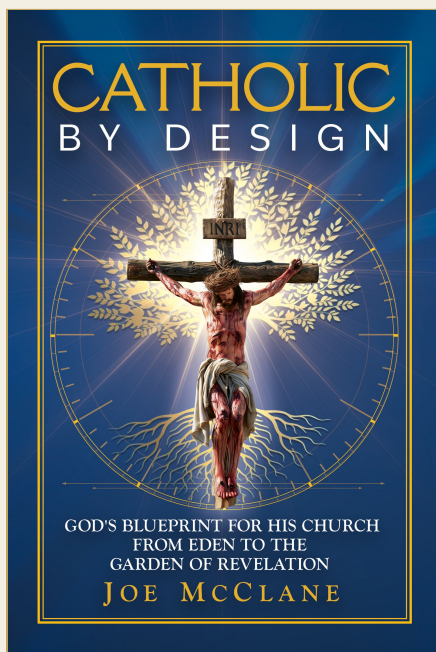
From Sorrow to Glory

In five mysteries we have watched the whole blueprint complete itself. Adam's thorns, David's stripes, Abraham's wood, and Moses' curse — gathered, every one of them, onto a single Cross. Nothing arbitrary. Nothing wasted. A design laid down from the foundation of the world and fulfilled in a single afternoon.

And then the grain of wheat that fell into the ground does what grains of wheat do: it rises. The tomb is the next garden, and the morning is coming. The Sorrowful Mysteries do not end in a sealed tomb; they open straight into the Glorious ones, where the Last Adam walks out of the earth alive and the curse is undone for good. For at the end of the whole story, in the city that has no temple because the Lamb is its temple, an angel makes the promise that all of this was for: "There shall no more be anything accursed." The thorns, the toil, the flaming sword at Eden's gate — all of it simply lifted.

So take up the beads, and take up the cross. Pray these mysteries not as a tragedy you are watching, but as the victory you have been invited into. And then follow Him — out of the garden, up the hill, through the tomb, and home to the Church He designed before the world began.

Keep Reading — Catholic By Design



The five meditations you just prayed are five threads of a single tapestry. What this little book showed you in the Sorrowful Mysteries — that the Passion of our Lord is no accident, but the deliberate fulfillment of a design woven through all of Scripture — the full book traces across the whole of salvation history, from the garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem.

Catholic By Design: God's Blueprint for His Church from Eden to the Garden of Revelation is the bigger picture: the covenants, the priesthood, the sacraments, the Queen Mother, the authority of the Church, and her destiny at the end of all things — shown to be not a human institution that evolved over time, but God's eternal design, revealed step by step from Genesis to Revelation.

If these five mysteries opened the Old Testament for you, the book will open the whole Bible. Find it on Amazon, in paperback and for Kindle.



About the Author

Joe McClane is a Traditional Catholic broadcaster, author, and documentary filmmaker, and the founder of Chi Rho Impact Media. For more than twenty years he has worked in radio, podcasting, and internet video, all of it ordered to one end: sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and His One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. He is the husband of Michelle, a father, and a grandfather.



An Invitation

If you have been away from the Church — from the Rosary, from Confession, from the table — know that the door is not locked. The same Lord who carried every curse up that hill carried yours. The Tree of Life is open, held wide by His nailed hands. Come home. The door is open.

How to Pray With This Booklet

Each mystery moves through five steps: a Scripture reading that pairs the Gospel scene with the Old Testament passage it fulfills, a Meditation that opens the connection between them, a word From the Fathers where one of the Church's great commentators speaks in his own voice, a few prompts to Ponder, and a closing Prayer. That's it — simple, deep, and ordered toward encounter.



A Note on Sources

This little book stands on the shoulders of others. The typological readings draw on my larger work, *Catholic By Design*; the voices of the Fathers are quoted from the sources noted below, that you might go and read them for yourself.

THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN. typology from CBD Ch. 5 (David's passion), Ch. 2 (Gethsemane/the Last Adam), Ch. 3 (the cup Adam refused); "He drank the cup..." verbatim CBD Ch. 3; "The mountain had seen a king's grief before..." adapted from CBD Ch. 5. Commentary: à Lapide on Luke 22:44 (Mossman, public domain). The David/Kidron parallel is CBD's own; à Lapide does not draw it.

THE SCOURING AT THE PILLAR. typology from CBD Ch. 6 ("The One Who Bore Every Covenant Burden") and Ch. 1 (David); "He bore the chastisement spoken of in the Davidic covenant" verbatim CBD Ch. 6. The 2 Sam 7:14 reading honors both senses — à Lapide's literal (covenant correction of David's line) and CBD's typological (the sinless Son absorbing the stripes). Commentary: à Lapide on Matt 27:26 (Mossman) and Isaiah 53:5 (translated from the public-domain Latin).

THE CROWNING WITH THORNS. typology from CBD Ch. 6 (the thorns Christ "took upon Himself"), Ch. 3, and the Sacred Heart image from Ch. 15 (St. Margaret Mary); "In losing His life on the Cross, He took upon Himself the curse of Adam — the thorns" verbatim CBD Ch. 6; "encircled in thorns, surmounted by a cross, burning with love" verbatim CBD Ch. 15. Commentary: à Lapide on Matt 27:29, citing Tertullian and Jerome (Mossman); à Lapide/Basil on Gen 3:18 (translated from the public-domain Latin).

THE CARRYING OF THE CROSS. typology from CBD Ch. 1 (Abraham/Isaac), the Introduction (the wood Adam fled / Isaac carried), and Ch. 4; "every detail of the Akedah points forward" and the Abraham-fidelity line verbatim CBD Ch. 1. Commentary: à Lapide on Gen 22:6 (translated from the public-domain Latin, after Prosper) and on John 19:17, citing Augustine (Mossman).

THE CRUCIFIXION. typology from CBD Ch. 6 ("the grain absorbed them all") and Ch. 3 (the Tree of Life on Calvary); "He was nailed to a tree... A hanged man is accursed by God... Saint Paul quotes this verse precisely" and "absorbed them all — became a curse for us..." verbatim CBD Ch. 6; "or so it might seem" verbatim CBD Ch. 6. Commentary: à Lapide on Deut 21:23 and Gal 3:13 citing Jerome (translated from the public-domain Latin); Luke 23:46 citing Athanasius (Mossman).

THE LAST WORD FROM THE TREE. CBD Ch. 3 ("The Way to the Tree of Life," §"Psalm 22 — Not Despair but Triumph"); "He is not despairing. He is declaring." and the framing

of the cry verbatim/adapted from CBD Ch. 3. Commentary: Bellarmine on Ps 21/22 (O'Sullivan, public domain) and à Lapide on Matt 27:46 (Mossman). à Lapide wrote no Psalms commentary; Bellarmine is the proper Catholic source for the psalm.