

*In Nomine Jesu*

## **He Turned to Them**

**Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Today we continue on the path to the crucifixion by contemplating the third and fourth Stations of the Cross. Last week we examined the first two stations. They were Pilate handing down judgment on Jesus and Jesus receiving His Cross. Today we are going to hear about Simon of Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross as well as the daughters of Jerusalem. As you think about these two images keep the antiphon of our Psalm for today in your mind, "Nevertheless, He looked up on their distress, when He heard their cry."<sup>1</sup>

The third station depicts Simon of Cyrene following Jesus bearing the Cross of Christ. Hear again one of the verses this image is based on,

*And as they led Him out, they took hold of Simon, a certain Cyrene coming from the country, they placed onto Him the cross to carry behind Jesus.<sup>2</sup>*

At this point, Jesus had been up all night, flogged, had a crown of thorns shoved onto His head, endured numerous legal trials and had been dragged all around Jerusalem. Therefore, it should be no surprise that Jesus physically was not up to carrying His own cross as would normally happen during a crucifixion. Maybe you wonder why the Romans would care if Jesus could carry His or not. Why did they bother getting someone to help Him?

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 106:44

<sup>2</sup> Luke 23:26

Well to put it simply, when the Romans crucified someone, they did the job right. And it just wouldn't do for their Prisoner to die before He was supposed to die. That would ruin the show. And make no mistake, this was meant to be a public performance of sorts. In this case both the Romans and the Jewish leaders wanted everyone to see what was happening to Jesus.

So in order to make sure that Jesus survives to make it to the cross, they draft Simon to carry the cross beam of Jesus' cross. We don't know too much about this man except that he was from Cyrene. (Mark does inform us that he had two sons named Alexander and Rufus.) The city of Cyrene is on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in modern day Libya in Northern Africa. Simon was likely one of the many Jews who lived in Cyrene during that time making the pilgrimage for the Passover. He likely was not expecting to end up assisting the Passover Lamb in His trek toward His sacrifice.

As you look at the image before you, notice that Jesus is looking behind Himself at Simon. His arm is outstretched before Him indicating that Jesus is still walking toward His goal. In this image you get the distinct idea that Jesus is leading the way to the crucifixion with Simon following behind.

It's easy as we go through these stations to get caught up in the emotion or maybe even guilt depending on how hard you've been hit by the law lately. As we keep moving forward though, I suggest that you remember Jesus' determination. He was determined to accomplish His

goal, and Simon was honored by being able to assist our Lord in getting to Calvary.

As determined as He was though, there was something else that drew His attention. Let's move to the fourth station of the cross,

*And following Him was a large crowd of people and women who were mourning and lamenting Him. But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not cry over me, rather over yourselves cry and over your children..."*

Jesus turned to them. These women were following after Jesus lamenting over His impending execution. This is the fulfillment of our Old Testament reading from Zechariah. These women seem to have realized what they had done. Perhaps they had participated in forcing Pilate to convict an innocent man or maybe stood by doing nothing. They might have even called out with the crowds for His crucifixion. But now, God poured out on them a spirit of grace and revealed to them the crime they have committed. And all they can do is weep.

Recognize that it was also your crime against God's Laws that put Jesus on the cross. It was your sin also that He bore to Golgotha. Your trespasses, your iniquity, your fault, are the reasons that He is walking this path. I bet that many of you have felt like the Daughters of Jerusalem before. Many of you have realized that you also put Jesus on that cross. Many of you likely have been distressed by the burden of the Law.

*"Nevertheless He looked upon their distress, when he heard their cry."<sup>3</sup>*

Jesus turned to them. Jesus pauses on this last leg of His suffering. He takes the time, enduring even further suffering by having to wait

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 106:44

longer, and speaks to these women. They are, after all, the ones who He is doing this all for. You also are those for whom He is doing all this.

Therefore take note of what He tells them. "Do not cry over me, rather over yourselves cry and over your children." Notice that this is not a particularly Gospel word He gives them. At least not on the surface level anyway. When you dig a bit deeper though, you can realize that He is, in fact, referencing the Gospel message.

They shouldn't be crying for Jesus. Why is that? Because He's doing what He came to do. He's accomplishing His goal. He's winning the war against the devil, the world, and our sinful nature. Lent is a somber time. And the Stations of the Cross depict our Lord's suffering in a way that can sometimes make us feel down and maybe even slightly depressed.

However you are free to remember what's really going on here. Yes it is our fault that Jesus is there. But as you look at these stations, you are looking at our victory. The cross is what it took for Jesus to win us back. It is an ugly thing this victory, but it is still His glory and our glory. It's offensive, but that's what it took to get the job done. And Jesus was determined to accomplish His task.

Yet Jesus isn't done talking to the women yet either. He still has more to say. Why should they be crying over themselves rather than over Jesus? Well He tells us.

*For behold in the coming days it will be said, "Blessed are the barren and the womb that has not born and breasts which have not nursed. They will begin to say to the mountain, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'cover us.' For if in the green woods this they do, in the dry*

*what will take place? And they led away also two other criminals with Him to be executed.*

We shouldn't be surprised about what Jesus tells us here. To sum it up, he's basically saying, "It's only going to get worse." To some extent He is speaking specifically to the daughters of Jerusalem here. After all it's not too far in the future that the Romans are going to lay waste to Jerusalem. But we also should not forget all the times He told the disciples that it's only going to get worse for His followers specifically.

Think about this: We have been living in relatively good times, or in the green woods, as Jesus says. But it's easy to look around the world and see that things aren't getting any better. Anyone can see that Jesus' prophecy is being fulfilled in our time as much as it has been in the past. I have heard Christian women say that they are afraid to bring children into today's world. This is a potentially frightening time to be a Christian. And it's only going to get worse.

If you get caught up by all the dire signs and omens that we are seeing, don't be afraid to remember this: "Nevertheless, He looked up on their distress, when He heard their cry." Ever wonder what it felt like to be Simon of Cyrene? Probably not. Yet I dare say you may be bearing the Cross of Christ just as much as Simon was, maybe more. These are the troubles that come upon us on account of the good confession of the Faith. Jesus told us that we would have pick up our crosses and follow Him.

When you feel that cross on your back, look to Jesus' cross. Do not do so in an effort to somehow marginalize your own burdens. Look to Jesus' cross and there see that Him dying on His cross is what leads to victory.

The crosses that all of you bear are heavy. The burden of being a Christian in this day and age is not an easy thing to carry on your shoulders. But you know what burden you aren't carrying? Do you know what cross you don't have to bear? The burden of your sin. Jesus was determined to bear that one for you. And He did, right to the very end, when He died with them still on His shoulders.

**Now may the peace which passes understanding, and which comes from our Lord's crucifixion, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

Stations of the Cross Lenten Series 2, 2015

March 4, 2015

Psalm 106:37-48, Zechariah 12:10-14, Luke 23:26-32

*Vicar Christopher M. Craig*  
*Soli Deo Gloria*