

FEATURES OF THIS WEEK'S ISSUE

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MESSAGE OF POPE LEO XIII. TO THE N.Z. TABLET.

Pergant Directores et Scriptores New Zealand Tablet, Apostolica Benedictione confortati, Religionis et Justitiae causam promovere per vias Veritatis et Pacis.
Die 4 Aprilis, 1900. LEO XIII., P.M.

TRANSLATION.—Fortified by the Apostolic Blessing, let the Directors and Writers of the New Zealand Tablet continue to promote the cause of Religion and Justice by the ways of Truth and Peace.
April 4, 1900. LEO XIII., Pope.



THURSDAY, APRIL 17, 1924.

THE SACRIFICE OF THE CROSS

AFTER hanging for three hours on the cross, Our Lord died. *Consummatum est!* His cry meant that sufferings had ended in death and His mission was accomplished according to God's will. Justice was satisfied; sin blotted out; and He was ready to die. He had endured the agony of the strife with death. When He called out: *Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit*, it was with humble confidence He gave back to the Father His life. And then, the painful death-struggle; the head sinks to His shoulder; a last sigh, and He breathes forth His soul. A soldier comes forward and pierces His side with a lance: the final sacrifice, this blood that drips from His torn heart! Darkness gathers round Him; in its midst a ghostly light makes visible the stark body hanging on the cross. The eyes of all the Christians of all time have seen it since; to the crack of doom it will remain visible to saints and sinners, that pale, wounded body on the cross on Calvary.

All the truths of our religion are centred round the cross: it justifies and illustrates them all. In storm and darkness it is a beacon: it enables us to feel the reality of whatever God deigns to reveal to us; it explains the meaning of love; it lights the abysses of our own human hearts for us; it points the way that leads to the attainment of our last end; it is a sign that warns us of dangers to be shunned. The cross is the pulpit from which Christ teaches us what we ought to do and what to avoid; it is the symbol of Christian character, reminding us to stand upright and to bear Christ within ourselves; it is the guarantee that every self-sacrifice made for God's sake will have its reward; it reminds us that the closer we cling to it, the more we shall please God. The cross of Christ is our support and protection. All other supports will be torn away from us; but at the end the cross will still be with us until it brings us to rest in the lasting city beyond the grave. The cross, the sign of weakness and the instrument for the punishment of malefactors, has become the object of deep spiritual love. Christianity has produced in the hearts of its children no richer fruit than love of the cross. Heathen sages were able to bear things hard for human nature; but to seek out the cross, to love it and thank God for it, that is only for the followers of Christ. One can never exhaust the

lessons of the cross. It stands by the wayside and gives to the weary passer-by the message of comfort that his crosses and trials lead him to Heaven; it shines from its place of honor on the altar, and on it the outstretched arms of Christ welcome the friendless and the suffering and cheer them and comfort them by reminding them of the dear companionship that sorrow gives; it hangs on the walls of the room, where hidden from the world, the saint finds new strength in it, or the sinner derives courage from the thought that Christ died for us all; it is clasped in the arms of the dying and whispers to the fearful soul the consoling message that the Christian faces the Judge, not naked or depending on himself, but clothed with the merits of Christ's Passion; it is before us morning and noon and night to proclaim to us that He died for all that they also who live, may not now live to themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again (2 Cor. v. 15). On the cross Christ is ever with us. In joy and sorrow, in trials and humiliations, He calls us to follow Him. And He also tells us that to do that we must deny ourselves and carry our own crosses in His footsteps. We must be willing to give up our ease and pleasure; we must conquer our evil inclinations; we must keep united with Christ through prayer and mortification. We cannot have the cross and the world at the same time. We must make our choice: there is no real union with Him except through denial of self; and there is no real prayer without hardship and mortification. To follow the cross means a constant warfare. The warfare is not easy, because it is a fight against self-love and selfishness; and it is only in the cross we can find strength to endure it to the end.

No words are so often and so lightly spoken as *God's will be done*. But we must learn to say them from our hearts, with deepest conviction and resignation, with perfect abandonment and submission, before we can advance on the road of the cross. When we can see health and honor and wealth come and go, with peaceful minds, perfectly resigned to the will of God, we are beginning to make progress. The true follower of Christ will bear cheerfully whatever God sends, seeking no comfort and having no end but to do God's will. And not until such detachment is attained will the soul be able to taste the sweetness of union with Christ and to know the perfect peace which is His gift to His own. A little cross outweighs a hundred prayer books; one day of silent and patient endurance of suffering sent from God's hand is better than a century of public works of benevolence. What then must be the merit of a life-long effort to make real for ourselves the prayer: *Thy will be done!* To do that means carrying the cross for life, overcoming ourselves, accepting humiliations, enduring slights and wrongs, pardoning enemies, guarding our lips, keeping clean our hearts, controlling our senses, praying at all times, embracing, in a word, the cross of a truly Christian life. To do that successfully is harder than to lay our heads on the block, harder than to give our lives for a friend: it is, in fine, to achieve what the saints did. From Calvary the lonely figure shining from the cross in the darkness invites us to do all this; on each Good Friday the call comes to us in clearer accents than at other times in the busy year. Conscious of past failures, mindful of broken resolutions our human nature urges us to reply that we are not able for the burden. But grace suggests to us that past failures ought to teach us humility and that broken resolutions ought to convince us of the folly of leaning on our own strength. And the words sung at the Mass of the Pre-sanctified bid us have courage and look up to the cross with hope in Him who is strong and holy and so full of love for us that He died to make it possible for all men to suffer for His sake as He did for theirs.

The humble are truly the born-rulers of men, for having won the victory over themselves they have learned to rule and no one can accuse them of personal ends or unworthy motives. Single-minded, self-controlled, gentle, and always considerate, they win the world to their feet.