

APPENDIX

Sermon delivered by St. Leonard on occasion of the erection of the Stations of the Cross in the Coliseum at Rome.¹

PRECIOUS metals, rich seams of gold, are laid bare only with difficulty, in delving into the entrails of the earth, but stones of real value must be sought for on the rocky crests of high mountains. To convince you of this truth, come with me to Mount Alverna, and gaze upon our glorious Patriarch, St. Francis of Assisi. Occupied solely in seeking for the precious pearl of evangelical perfection, he was at a loss to know,

¹ As I write this sermon of St. Leonard it is borne in upon me strongly how inadequate such a translation must be as a sample of his preaching. Leonard was not a "pulpit orator"—*i.e.*, as I understand the term, one whose sermons were literary masterpieces, as those of Bourdaloue and Massillon and others. He was essentially a popular preacher, the value of whose work lay less in what he said than in the way he said it. His sermons are invaluable to preachers as guides to a simple, earnest, and straightforward treatment of the subject-matter, but beyond that, so it seems to me, they represent only the channel whence his great influence passed out, and not its source. This lay in Leonard himself. I append this translation, then, for its historic interest, as having been preached on a great occasion, and as an example of the Saint's simplicity and clarity of treatment, rather than of his missionary powers.

in the midst of the privations of his austere poverty and the rigours of his great penitence, to what exercise of piety he should, by preference, devote himself. One day, as he turned over in his mind various thoughts on this subject, he was suddenly rapt into ecstasy, and, in the fervour of his burning love, found himself transformed into Jesus Crucified ; that is to say, he received in feet and hands the sacred wounds of the Saviour. This Seraph, then, in human form, understood that he was to seek no other treasure than Jesus Crucified—that his one occupation for the rest of his life was to think of Jesus Crucified, to live crucified, and to impress on the hearts of men a sweetly sorrowing remembrance of Jesus Crucified.

This saving remembrance of the Passion of our Divine Redeemer is precisely the heavenly pearl with which I hope to enrich your souls by the erection of the Stations of the Cross, which is to take place in this wonderful amphitheatre. When paganism was still dominant, this ground was the arena whence hundreds and thousands of Christians won the palm of martyrdom, and whence, glorious and triumphant, they took their flight towards Heaven. Admire, then, dear brethren, the touching object here offered to your piety—namely, the adorable blood of Jesus Christ, shed so abundantly on the road to Calvary, and mystically mingled here with that blood of the martyrs which has consecrated this famous Coliseum. Thus, in proportion as this place was of old profaned by the

abominations of the pagan, so henceforth will it be sanctified by the pious veneration of the faithful. Nay, more, I hope that, thanks to the interest of Our Holy Father the Pope, who, in his great piety, has himself had these Stations set up, we shall see this amphitheatre, of old one of the wonders of the world, becoming in our own day one of Rome's greatest sanctuaries.

Rejoice, then, dear brethren, rejoice; and listen now to what I have to say to you this evening. I shall be short, but I shall speak to you with a full heart. Let us begin.

FIRST PART

A treasure, great and precious though it may be, is only appreciated in proportion as it is known. Hence it is that many amongst you do not value as you ought the Way of the Cross. Treasure immense though it be, it remains for the most part hidden and unknown; for the very Blood Itself, of infinite value, which Our Saviour shed in such abundance, is known but little and appreciated less. Allow me, then, in this simple and homely instruction, to show you briefly how this exercise of the Way of the Cross is most excellent in its origin, most profitable in its results, and very easy to practise.

To convince you of its excellence, suffice it to know that the Way of the Cross is simply a pious representation of the sorrowful journey which Our Lord made, all covered with blood, from the

Pretorium of Pilate to the place of His burial ; and since Our Divine Saviour traversed this way bearing on His shoulders the heavy burden of the Cross, with which the treachery of the Jews had charged Him, we call it the Way of the Cross. And if you would know why we meet therein with so many stations and crosses, each of which offers us a fresh subject of sorrow, understand that each *station* represents one of those hallowed spots where Our Suffering Saviour was obliged to stay awhile and rest. These points are called *stations* from the Latin word *stare, to stop* ; and since from the house of Pilate to the tomb our Saviour stopped fourteen times, twelve times in life and twice after His death, we distinguish fourteen Stations of the Cross.

“ What a beautiful idea ! ” you will exclaim ; “ but to whom, then, do we owe this holy exercise ? ” You would know this ? Ah, well, it was an idea of the wonderful Heart of Mary, ever Virgin. Yes, it was the most holy Virgin who first thought of this pious devotion of the Way of the Cross. She herself practised it and handed it down to her faithful servants. It is what she said herself to St. Bridget. “ Know, my daughter,” she told her, “ that during all the time I lived after the Ascension of my Divine Son, I visited every day those holy places where He suffered, where He died, and where He showed forth His mercies.” Now, I ask you, as good Christians, does not this one motive, this knowledge that the Way of the Cross was invented, not by any one

Saint or other, but by the august Mother of God —does not this motive alone, I ask, suffice to win your hearts and enkindle your fervour? Can you not take a resolution to practise it as often as possible, seeing that the Blessed Virgin practised it every day? Let us add that Adricomius, a writer of great authority, not merely attributes to the Blessed Virgin the origin of the Way of the Cross, but asserts, moreover, that it is this pious practice which has given birth in the Church to the custom of having processions, and always with the Cross at the head. He bases his assertion on a pious and ancient tradition; and, indeed, there are many things in the Church which we know only by tradition handed down from father to son....¹ What say you now, dear brethren? Is it enough to make you acknowledge the singular excellence of the Way of the Cross? May we not say that it is, as it were, the mother of all devotions, since it is the most ancient of all, and the most holy, the most devout, and the most excellent? Justly, then, does it merit pre-eminence over all the rest. In the depths of your hearts, then, pronounce sentence in its favour, crying: "How precious a treasure! Oh, how precious a treasure!"

The faithful of the early Church knew this treasure well, and appreciated it. Moved by the example of the Blessed Virgin, who daily practised the exercise of the Way of the Cross, they showed such zeal in visiting night and day the holy

¹ The Latin text of Adricomius is here omitted.

stations of Jerusalem that they excited the wrath of the pagans. The latter, unable to endure the sight of such crowds, thought to stop them by setting up on the summit of Calvary a statue of Venus, and over the Holy Sepulchre a statue of Jupiter, hoping that the Christians would be turned aside from visiting these holy places for fear of being taxed with idolatry. These infamous statues were later destroyed by St. Helena, and the spots, consecrated by such august memories, restored to their rightful place of honour. However, as time went on, the charity of men grew cold. The Holy Land, moreover, fell into the power of the Mussulman, and it became increasingly difficult to visit the *stations* with the requisite reverence. But in 1322, thanks be to God, Robert, King of Sicily and Jerusalem, conceived, by Divine inspiration, the pious plan of entrusting the guardianship of the Holy Places to the Friars Minor. Hence it is that the Sovereign Pontiffs have reserved exclusively to us the privilege of erecting the Stations of the Cross, and attaching thereto the indulgences which have been granted to them. One may call this a tacit compensation for all that our religious have had to endure in the Holy Land. Barely had they taken over the guardianship of these sanctuaries before they thought of re-establishing once more on the holy mountain the exercise of the Way of the Cross. Having received from the Sovereign Pontiffs a great many indulgences in favour of this pious

practice, they set themselves to propagate it throughout the entire world. So well have they succeeded, in our own time especially, that we may say that every town has become a new Jerusalem, every hill a Calvary, and every sanctuary a Way of the Cross, so few are the places where they have not been erected. Men have at last opened their eyes, and now acknowledge that, among all the practices of piety, this is the holiest and most useful and most excellent of all those which are held in honour in the Church of God. Allow me, then, in admiration at the untold prodigies of excellence found in the Way of the Cross, to exclaim once more : "How great a treasure ! Oh, how great a treasure!"

If the excellence of this devotion makes it most acceptable to us for its own sake, the advantages it procures us should make it doubly dear. The blood shed by our Divine Saviour in His sorrowful journey to Calvary, is it not the source of all good ? Let us, then, affirm unhesitatingly that the Way of the Cross is salutary for the living, be they just or sinners, salutary for the dead, and salutary, in fine, both for time and eternity.

And, firstly, what occupation more pleasing for the soul in grace than to pass from one cross to another, from one station to another, drawing from each mystery a spiritual consolation which rejoices her heart and gives her a sensible foretaste of Heaven ? Indeed, make trial of it when sad

thoughts trouble you and dark days are upon you ; pass over the Way of the Cross, and lo ! the clouds will fade quickly away and a clear sky shine down on you.

But more salutary far is it for the sinner. According to the common teaching of the Fathers, it is the thought of our Saviour's sufferings that calls down upon us every grace, whilst it is from base forgetfulness of so great a benefit that all our falls come and all our sorrows. It is even by endeavouring to efface from our minds the remembrance of the Passion of our Saviour that the Devil hopes to drag us down to eternal ruin. This was once revealed to a holy soul. Being rapt into ecstasy, this faithful servant of God saw the devils holding a sort of council in the depths of Hell, and discussing amongst themselves the most efficacious means of destroying souls. One, more clever than the rest, suggested that the best means of destroying the whole Catholic world would be to lay low all the crosses, and thus bring it to pass that men should think no longer of the Passion of the Son of God. This dastardly advice was greeted with applause by all the wicked spirits, and they are adopting it in practice only too well. Set yourselves to meditate on death, judgment, Hell, and eternity ; the Devil sleeps on unmoved and heedless ; but meditate on the Passion of Our Saviour—that is his nightmare, his torment—all Hell bestirs itself to raise obstacles in your path. An experience extending over many years has led me to remark

that every time there is question of erecting anywhere the Way of the Cross a hundred objections are raised immediately in order to obstruct so great a good. Here in Rome, even, was there an entire absence of all murmuring? Few, thanks be to God, very few, but still some remarks have been heard against this Way of the Cross in the Coliseum. And whence does this malign influence come? Do not be surprised when I tell you it is the Devil, who knows the Way of the Cross to be a precious source of holy thoughts and devout meditations and salutary resolutions, and in consequence foresees therein many a defeat for himself. Sinners, seeing these Stations and pondering on the mysteries they represent, are indeed touched, and become converted and turn back again to God. Every parish priest bears witness to this, all exhort their people to practise often the Way of the Cross; and they soon notice a great change for the better and more inclination towards good. Try it for yourself, my poor sinner, try it for yourself; learn to love this holy exercise, practise it often, and you will see how your heart will change.

But the value of the Way of the Cross does not end here. The Precious Blood, shed by Our Divine Saviour during His sorrowful journey to Calvary, does not only serve to soften the hearts of even the most hardened sinners: it serves also to relieve the poor souls in Purgatory. When we apply to these poor souls the many indulgences granted by the Sovereign Pontiffs, we

quench the expiatory flames of their abode of suffering, or, at any rate, diminish their force. To be convinced of this truth, it is enough to read the Brief of Our Holy Father of the 30th of August, 1741, which shows clearly his zeal and special love for this holy devotion. Not content with confirming the ordinances of his predecessors, and the privileges accorded by them, he goes on to exhort the parish priests to introduce this profitable exercise into their churches. To set all obstacles aside and dissipate any doubts that may have arisen, he has reissued the declarations of the Sacred Congregation, adding a tenth paragraph of his own, in which he makes his own feelings clear. Thus all is established now beyond question, and there is nothing we could wish for further. You will find this Brief, translated so that all may read it, as well as the Declarations of the Congregation, in a little work, recently printed in Rome, on the Way of the Cross.¹

As regards the number of these indulgences, all I may say is that they are many indeed, some plenary and others partial; but the Sacred Congregation forbids the publication of any definite or certain number. All one may affirm is that whoever makes the Stations of the Cross devoutly, in a place where they have been canonically erected, gains the same indulgences as if he visited personally the Stations on the *Via Dolorosa* at Jerusalem. Remember always that we can only

¹ By St. Leonard himself.

gain *one* plenary indulgence a day (except in the Jubilee year) *for ourselves*; apply, then, one to yourselves and the rest to the souls in Purgatory. That this application may hold good, make it at the beginning of the exercise, or, at any rate, before the end.

Rejoice, then, my dearly beloved, rejoice in your hearts, since every day of the year you can win so great a treasure of indulgences. And, note well, these indulgences are free, perpetual, and entail no special obligations; to gain them it is not necessary to go to Confession and Communion; it is enough to be in a state of grace and to fulfil the conditions laid down by the Sovereign Pontiffs. These conditions are three. The first, as I have said, is to be in a state of grace. If ever you should find yourselves in a state of mortal sin, make an act of contrition, and continue to practise the Way of the Cross: it will win for you from God the light and grace you need to rise up out of that miserable state, or at least it will serve to relieve the souls in Purgatory if you apply the indulgences to them. The second condition is to go from one Station to another, except where it may be physically or morally impossible. It is not necessary to genuflect before the Cross; a simple inclination will suffice. The third embodies the very essence of this holy exercise; it consists in meditating on the Passion of Our Lord. This is the real reason which has led the Sovereign Pontiffs to extend and popularize this salutary devotion. They see

in it a means of introducing amongst the faithful, almost imperceptibly, the practice of meditation, which is the source of all good. The Sacred Congregation has, however, made it clear that, for the less instructed, a simple reflection on the Passion will suffice, in which they endeavour, as best they may, to compassionate with Our Lord in His sufferings. The recitation of an *Our Father* and *Hail Mary*, and an act of contrition at each Station, are counselled but not imposed as an obligation. You see, then, how easy it is to practise this holy exercise; all we need is to meditate a little on the Passion of Our Lord, and say an *Our Father*, *Hail Mary*, and an act of contrition at each Station.

If all I have said so far still leaves you indifferent to so great a good, allow yourselves at least to be touched with compassion for the souls in Purgatory. Ah! if a ray of heavenly light could but draw aside the veil from your eyes, you would see these suffering souls hovering around each Station, with upraised arms imploring you: “*Have pity on me!* *Have pity on me!* In pity for us, make the Way of the Cross—for me, your father; for me, your mother; for me, your friend.” Is there one here whose heart is so hard as not to be softened and moved with compassion at so sorrowful a cry? As you deliver them from Purgatory, so do you insure yourselves against Hell.

The indulgences we may gain are a motive, quite fitting indeed, for leading us to practise

frequently the Stations of the Cross, but the main purpose of this so touching devotion does not lie there. The Blood of Our Divine Redeemer is not merely salutary for the living, be they just or sinners ; not merely salutary for the dead, to whom we may apply It by indulgences ; but much more is It salutary, in time and eternity, by the virtues and merits and great increase of grace It enables us to acquire, and the very special satisfaction we may procure thereby to the Heart of Jesus. Jesus Himself once revealed this to one of His servants. On the latter asking constantly and with great devotion what homage he could render which would be most agreeable in His eyes, Jesus Christ appeared to him with a cross on His shoulders and said : " My son, help Me to carry this cross, by making the Way of the Cross and meditating constantly on My sorrowful Passion. Thus you will procure for My Heart a most sweet satisfaction." Is it surprising, then, that all the Saints have thought so highly of this noble exercise? St. Bonaventure says that there is no practice of piety more efficacious for making us holy than the Way of the Cross. Without quoting innumerable other witnesses—for fear I should overstep the limits of time I have set myself—let me conclude with a thought from Blessed Albert the Great. Listen attentively, and when the Devil inspires you with repugnance for the Way of the Cross, recall this thought. He says that we gain more merit by a single meditation on the Passion of Jesus Christ—consequently

by making *once* the Way of the Cross—than by fasting every Friday of the year on bread and water ; that we merit more in making the Way of the Cross than by taking the discipline to blood several times ; that we merit more in making the Way of the Cross than in reciting the entire Psalter ; that we merit more in making the Way of the Cross than by going bare-foot on pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James of Compostella. So speaks this great doctor.

And now, what say you ? Are you not ravished at the sight of these treasures of grace and virtue and merit offered you in the practice of this holy exercise ? Well, then, repeat from the depths of your hearts : “ How precious ! how immense a treasure ! ” Or, better still, let each one of you, deep down in your own souls, take this holy and salutary resolution : “ Henceforth my most cherished devotion, the one I shall love above all others, will be this holy exercise of the Way of the Cross,” and conclude with St. Paul : *Let me not glory, save in the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ.*

SECOND PART

How brilliant is a pearl of great value when set in a golden ring ! The Way of the Cross, as we have just seen, is a pearl of great value, a heavenly pearl. How brilliantly, then, will it not shine when set up in this wonderful amphitheatre, in this venerable relic of antiquity ! But

why is it that this ancient monument is so admirable? Is it on account of the Roman Emperors who set themselves to make of it the most majestic and splendid edifice in the world, as being destined to be the scene of their barbarous and unholy pleasures? Is it because ten thousand Jews enslaved by Titus were employed in its construction, or because ten million Roman crowns were spent on it, or rather, as Cassiodorus remarks, a veritable river of wealth poured out upon it? Is it on account of the magnificence of its architecture and the nicety of its execution, which are such that, as Martial thinks, it surpasses by far all other wonders of the world? Must we sing its praises on account of the immensely flattering oracle pronounced upon it which we find recorded in the *Collectanea* of Venerable Bede? Listen to it: *As long as the Coliseum remains, so long will Rome remain: when the Coliseum falls, Rome too will fall; and when Rome falls, then will the whole world crumble away.* Is it, then, on account of such praises as these, and many others, lavished on this Coliseum of ours by illustrious men, that we must pronounce it so admirable and so worthy of veneration? No, dear brethren, no. What is it, then, that makes us exalt to the skies this wonderful and stupendous monument? It is the precious blood of so many hundreds and thousands of martyrs, devoured by wild beasts, torn asunder by the hand of the executioner, consumed by fire, or in a thousand other ways, tortured and immolated before God. This blood so pure, this

is what makes the Coliseum admirable in our eyes and worthy of veneration ; this is what has bound together the Faith of Rome ; and this it is which will establish the Holy See more immutably than ever in this capital of the world.

To inflame your hearts with loving devotion towards the holy martyrs who here shed their blood for Jesus Christ, let us dwell on their numbers, their nature, their constancy.

As for the number, you can judge of it by the witty and profound reply which the Pope, St. Pius V., once gave to some who asked from him relics ; he sent them to gather up the soil from the Coliseum, all saturated as it is with martyrs' blood, alluding thereby to the vast number of those athletes of Jesus Christ who, by their blood, consecrated this amphitheatre. One of the most famous was St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, who, if not the very first, was at any rate one of the first, and deserves, by reason of his glorious deeds, to be called in some sort the proto-martyr of the Coliseum. Such was the constancy of this illustrious confessor of the faith that, writing to the faithful at Rome, he begs them not to seek by their prayers to hinder his triumph. This had happened to other Christians, whose bodies, thanks to a Divine interposition, had been respected by the wild beasts. *For fear, he wrote, they dare not touch my body, as happened to other martyrs.* He wished to be ground as wheat by the teeth of lions ; and such was indeed his fate, for his ardent wishes were fulfilled to the letter.

Other martyrs of whom we have unquestioned record are St. Eustachius and his companions, St. Bibiana, St. Martina, SS. Abdon and Sennen, two hundred and seventy-two soldiers, St. Vitus, St. Modesta, St. Sempronius and his companions, and a crowd of others whom it would be too long to name. I shall confine myself to two others, of whom the first was the architect himself of this marvellous monument. According to ancient documents it appears that this was a pious Christian called Gaudentius. Pagans maliciously pass his name by in silence, but he merits special mention and praise, less on account of his genius, which has left so lasting and glorious a monument, as on account of the palm of martyrdom won at the hands of the cruel and ungrateful Vespasian. The other is the last of the martyrs who hallowed this spot with their blood, the holy Solitary St. Almachius. This saintly hermit, hearing with what profusion human blood was being poured forth in this Coliseum, left Palestine and came to Rome. At a moment when the amphitheatre was filled with spectators he burst forth into the midst of the gladiators, and with a boldness born of sanctity lifted up his voice in condemnation of such pagan cruelty. The Prefect Alipius, who was present, ordered him to be put to death, and, as Baronius tells us, the command was immediately executed. It was after this that the Emperor Honorius passed a strict law putting a stop altogether to these sanguinary gladiatorial shows.

Tertullian, who flourished in the third century, relates something which gives us an idea of the vast numbers of martyrs who perished in the Coliseum. He tells us in his *Apologeticus* that the pagans were accustomed to attribute to the Christians whatever evil befell their city or empire. Did any calamity occur—a famine, a war, an earthquake, the plague, the flooding of the Tiber, or such like—straightway the pagans would gather in the streets, crying: *The Christians to the lions!* *The Christians to the lions!* (*Christiani ad leones!* *Christiani ad leones!*) Picture to yourselves how these unfortunate Christians must have suffered during so many years. But why call them unfortunate? Happy rather—a thousand times happy! The one thing I envy in those ancient times was the ever-recurring opportunity of becoming a martyr for Jesus Christ. Dear brethren, if we cannot be martyrs indeed, let us at least to-night be martyrs in desire. Let us at least imitate those Saints and servants of God who, filled with devotion for the holy martyrs, professed a sovereign veneration for this holy spot, visited it often, and obtained herein most signal graces. St. Philip Neri, apostle of Rome, and devoted to the holy martyrs, was not satisfied with honouring them by often passing the whole night through in the catacombs of St. Calixtus, under the Church of St. Sebastian; he often visited as well this Coliseum of ours, which he held in great esteem. One day, as he was meditating here in this holy place on the glorious lot of the martyrs

who merited so great a grace, he was assaulted by the Devil, who came to tempt him under the form of an evil woman. The Saint immediately made the sign of the Cross, and, invoking the aid of the martyrs, completely triumphed over the enemy. St. Ignatius Loyola, Founder of the illustrious Society of Jesus, experienced also the protection of our holy martyrs, to whom he had a great devotion. The mother-house being, at the beginning, in a state of great penury and lacking in the most indispensable things, it happened one day that an unknown person offered the procurator, here in this very Coliseum, an alms of a hundred golden crowns. St. Camillus de Lellis, bowed down with grief at not being able to be ordained priest at St. John Lateran, on account of some oversight of his Bishop, found great consolation in drawing near to the Coliseum, for a happy inspiration came to him, through the intercession of the holy martyrs, showing him how the obstacle might be removed.

And you, dear brethren, what can you do? Is not your fervour reawaking to-night? Would you remedy the difficulties which weigh down your families? Come to the Coliseum, make with devotion the Way of the Cross, and rest assured that you will find therein a remedy for all your woes. And now allow me to close this discourse with the expression of a wish. May it please God that what happened in the case of a great servant of God, Dom Charles Tommasi, uncle of His Eminence the Cardinal,

of happy memory, may also happen with me ! His devotion to the holy martyrs led him to oppose a bull-fight which it had been proposed to hold in the Coliseum. Not merely did he succeed in stopping it, but he published also a little work called *A Brief Notice on the Amphitheatre of Flavian, consecrated by the Precious Blood of Innumerable Martyrs*, whereby he excited in Rome a great devotion to the holy martyrs, and rendered the Coliseum more venerable than ever in the eyes of the world. May it please God that my poor words may have a like effect ! And wherefore not ? Tell me, dear brethren, if these holy martyrs, these servants of God of whom we have just spoken, were to come back amongst us and to see what you see now—the Coliseum enriched with so noble an ornament, the Way of the Cross—what acts of fervent thanksgiving would they not offer up to Heaven ! With what zeal would they not come to visit the *Stations* ! And you, I repeat, what do you mean to do ? In what way will your fervour show itself this evening ? How can you possibly refrain from blessing God for having opened to you so straight a road and easy to the conquest of Heaven ? Come, then ; let us altogether bless the Lord ; and not in your hearts only : no, no, I shall not be content with that, but we must bless Him aloud, with a voice that all may hear. Repeat, then, all of you, after me: *Blessed be God ! Blessed be God !* Repeat it, I say, repeat it: *Blessed be God !* Some of you seem ashamed

to bless God : I am surprised. Now, once more, all of you, men and women : *Blessed be God !*

NOTE.—This is really the end of the sermon. As printed in the various editions of the Saint's works, it is followed by a brief exhortation to the men present to enrol themselves in the *Society of True Lovers of Jesus and Mary*, whose principal function was to make the Stations of the Cross processionaly on Sundays and Fridays ; and finally by a few practical observations calculated to insure order and reverence during the Way of the Cross which was to follow the sermon.