



A RETREAT FOR HOLY WEEK by Father Robbie Low

**Five Characters in Search of an Author**  
**4 – THE WOMEN and THE WOMAN**

Luke is always the one who invites us into the little detailed moments we might otherwise forget or overlook. So, at what became the eighth station, he pauses to record a conversation. There is the turbulent crowd, a mixture of confusion and bitterness and howling grief. Among those who follow the dismal tortuous and tortured procession are the women of Jerusalem.

They are not the Madame Lafarge of the guillotine, not the gurning twisted-face sadists who enjoy the last racking pains of the condemned. They are the ordinary folk of the city, daughters, sisters, mothers. They are the disenfranchised so they use the only voice they have to bewail the cruel and disturbing decision of those in authority. The healer, the teacher, the life-giver, the hope of Israel is to be judicially murdered. They cannot know the cosmic enormity of what is happening but they sense the burgeoning tragedy for one mother and her only Son. So they weep and Jesus speaks.

We cannot know the tone of His voice, compassionate or commanding.

We know that He is about to die for them too. We know that, beaten and severely weakened, every breath is an effort. We know that He says more to them than anything else He utters on the road to the Passion. He commands them not to weep for Him but for themselves and for their children. Jesus understands their plight. He knows their future.

Long after He is Risen, Ascended and Glorified, the tragedy of an Israel that knew not the moment of its Messiah's coming will begin to unfold. When, thirty years hence, the future Emperor, Titus, surrounded the city with his legions, it was the beginning of the end of historical Israel. The fall of the city in AD 70 was accompanied by massacre and ruin. Only the Western Wall of the Temple remained. The last smolderings of rebellion were snuffed out at the heroic siege of Masada three years later. Israel would spend nineteen centuries in exile.

The women who wept for Jesus, their children and grandchildren would lie in piles of the slaughtered jamming the streets and lanes of David's city. Truly it would have been better to be barren than endure this.

So Jesus knows. Jesus understands. Jesus has compassion on these poor souls who cannot yet know or comprehend the fate of this city and their own. Only those who have fled, as much of the early and rejected Christian community did, would survive this holocaust of sword and fire.

But there is another woman who weeps.

She has followed the whole of Jesus' life. She has known the terrifying miracle of the Angelic presence and the Promise. She has risked all for faithfulness. She has roughed it on the road and in a cattle shed. She has

been confirmed by the dreams of her husband, by the testimony of visionaries, by the extravagant gifts of strangers, by the witness of divine wisdom.

She has come to this Temple often. The first time as a mother she was met by two devout worshippers who embraced her Child and, Holy Spirit driven, prophesied in words that cascade down the centuries in the liturgy of the Church. The Messiah has come. I can die in peace. A sword will pierce your soul, Mary. The secrets of all hearts will be revealed.

Thirty years on that sword is turning in the heart of The Mother of all the Faithful, the Mother of all who will live. Mary confronts the ultimate nightmare of any mother. She has no way to save her dying child.

The meeting of Jesus and His Mother on the Via Dolorosa has no words. What words could there be to describe that moment. Heart speaks to heart. The Church understands all too well what is happening and what will happen on the Cross when Christ gives His mother to every beloved disciple. The secrets of all hearts are revealed in our response to Mary. Those who have no space for her diminish the reality of the Incarnation and reject Christ's gift to His Church. No wonder they go astray.

As she weeps for the Child of Promise, faithful to the end of all this strange pilgrimage – an end that, the other side of Hell, will be the glorious new beginning and eternal hope of Man – she is in the company of those who do not yet know the fullness of their sorrow.

Christ turns to them, as His Church turns to all the confused and the lost and warns of the destiny of those who will reject God – the fall and ruin of the City of Man.

So let us weep with Our Mother for the world's rejection of her Son and repent of our part in that. Let us weep with the Women of Jerusalem for those whose sufferings we witness.

For our spiritual exercise let us contemplate all those women who cannot save their children from death and recommit ourselves to the Corporal Works of Mercy. Then let us contemplate all those whose children have no knowledge of the things of Christ and are dying for lack of the Gospel. Then let us recommit ourselves to the Spiritual Works of Mercy.

Then we will indeed be children of the New Eve and little brothers and sisters of the Word made flesh, the Crucified, the Eternal sacrifice, the Great High Priest, the Lord of Glory. Jesus the Christ.

### **The seven corporal works of mercy**

To feed the hungry.

To give drink to the thirsty.

To clothe the naked.

To shelter the homeless.

To visit the sick.

To ransom the captive (presently interpreted as to visit the imprisoned)

To bury the dead.

## **The seven spiritual works of mercy**

To instruct the ignorant.

To counsel the doubtful.

To admonish sinners.

To bear wrongs patiently.

To forgive offences willingly.

To comfort the afflicted.

To pray for the living and the dead

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