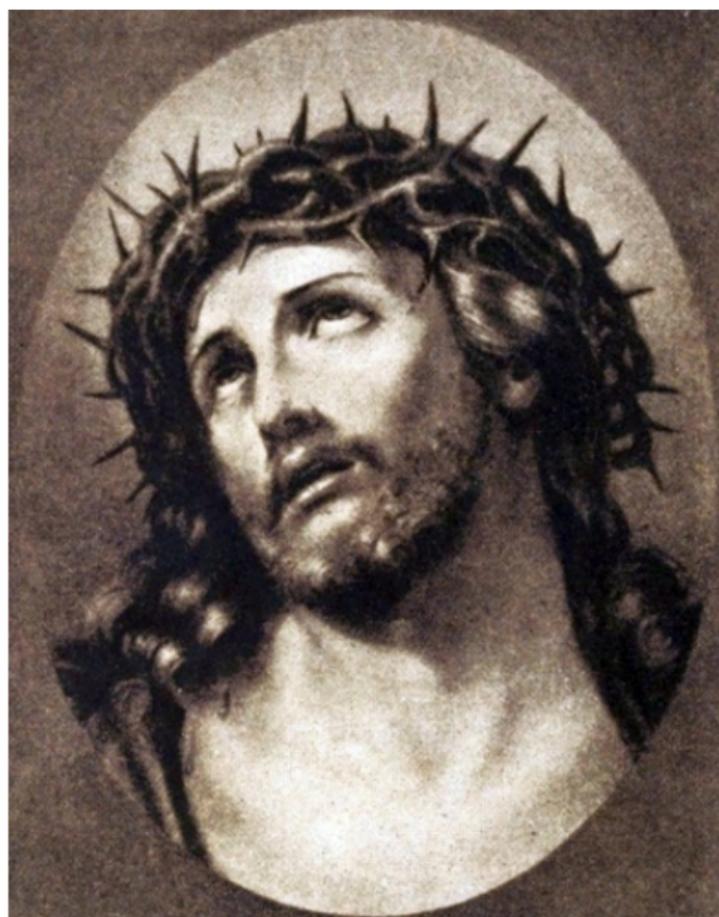


# On the Passion

Father John O'Rourke, S.J.



Stabat Mater Press



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**The Mountains of Myrrh**

**By the Fr. John O'Rourke, S.J.**

*Authored in the year of Our Lord, 1921*

Editing has been made for the purpose to correct typological, grammatical, or spelling errors in the originally work. Any apparent remaining errors in the work have remained by reason of maintaining the intent of the author.

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## Preface

These pages, treating in a simple meditative manner of the sufferings of our Blessed Saviour, have already appeared in *The Messenger of the Sacred Heart*. They are now published in permanent form with the hope of increasing a love for the Sacred Passion. Spiritual writers tell us that the ordinary food of the fervent soul is a devotion to our Lord's sufferings; while the author of "The Following of Christ" says that there are more lovers of our Lord in His glory on Mount Thabor than in His agony and humiliation on Mount Calvary. In any case we can rest assured that in moments of pain and anguish, and truly there are many such in all lives, nothing can be more helpful, nothing more consoling, than to know and remember that our Blessed Master endured pain and sorrow for our sake; and that pain and sorrow bravely and patiently borne make us more and more like unto Him.

My sincere thanks are due to my dear friends, Father Joseph H. Smith, S. J., and Father John Corbett, S. J., who revised these pages and saw them through the press.

- *Father John O'Rourke, S.J.*

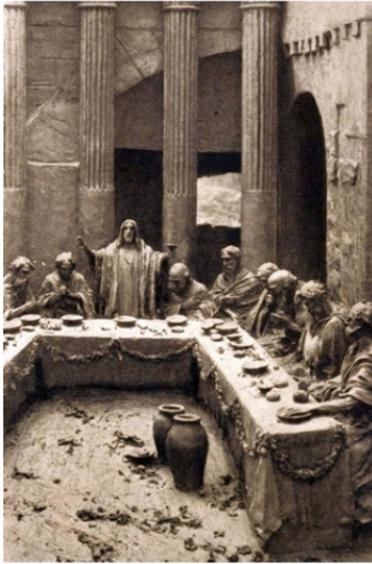
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## From the Cenacle to Olivet

Every least detail of the Law having been carried out by our Blessed Saviour at the Last Supper, He washed the feet of His Disciples, lingering no doubt lovingly and sorrowfully over those of Judas; and, mindful of the promise made by the Lakeshore, He instituted the Sacrament of love. When every sacred rite was over, "a hymn being said they went forth unto the mount of Olives." When the tones of that sublime act of thanksgiving had died upon their lips they walked out into the moonlit road, and our Saviour began His journey of sorrow which before set of sun on the next day was to end with the shedding of His Blood on Mount Calvary. There are some commentators who think that the prophetic warnings of our Lord that night were uttered on this journey from the Cenacle to Gethsemani, but Saint Luke seems to place these events before the departure from the supper chamber.



The evening is cold and chilly, as it usually is in March in Jerusalem even after a comparatively warm and dry day. The Paschal moon in all its fulness is lighting the narrow streets through which they are silently passing on towards the city wall. As the Temple gates will be opened at midnight, the people are already astir preparing for the festival. Our Lord and His Apostles, moving rapidly through the streets, can perhaps see the lights flickering in the porches and colonnades of the Temple, and hear the tramp of moving feet, which doubtless the Apostles attribute to the gathering of the early worshippers, the while our Blessed Saviour Himself knows that it is His enemies who, it may be under the leadership of Judas, are getting ready with the soldiers to go to the Garden and apprehend Him.

Their way stretched most probably through Ophel, which lies south of the Temple, and out through the gate in the southeastern angle of the wall into the valley of Josaphat. This is the last time our Blessed Saviour will pass through the Sacred City, the city He loved so well and over which but a few days previously He wept, a free Man.

When He enters it again, His hour will have come and He will be a prisoner in the hands of His bitter enemies. Willingly He is going to meet those who are thirsting for His death, traveling over the same road by which David hurried away from his ungrateful son, Absalom, anxious for his father's throne and his father's life. Where our Lord and His Apostles are passing David sent Sadoc back with the Ark saying: "Carry back the Ark of God into the city; if I find grace in the sight of the Lord, He will bring me again, and He will show me it and His tabernacle." Only an hour ago our Blessed Saviour had given His Body and His Blood to His Apostles, and they, together with their successors, were for all time to keep that Blessed Food in the Tabernacle for the strengthening of the children of men. This gift was His last gift of love, His final testimony of affection before going forth to die at the ninth hour on the morrow.

Shortly after nine o'clock our Lord and His Apostles are probably walking silently in the shadow of the great city wall towards the garden. It is not easy to imagine what must have been the feelings of His loved ones, accompanying their Master at that hour of the night. The stillness which hung over the valley even at the short distance from the city, the dark shadows of the high wall flung out over the ravine and the dried brook, the stunted vegetation, the light making its way through the branches and moving leaves of the olive trees, the calmness and almost unnatural silence which reigned about them, broken only by the stumbling of their own footsteps, all these circumstances must have deeply affected the spirits of the simple Galileans.

There had that night been a solemnity about the Master such as they had never witnessed before. His words and His mysteries had touched the deepest depths of their affection, and so they followed Him anxiously and with a feeling of awe as He walked with bowed head and broken heart to the first sad scene of the morrow's tragedy.

About one hundred and fifty feet from the garden our Lord turned and addressed His Apostles, as the Scripture tells us. He said to them: "Sit you here till I go yonder and pray." These words were spoken to eight of the eleven who were with Him; for from what follows it is clear that Peter, James and John accompanied the Master into the garden, for we read in Saint Mark: "And He taketh Peter, James and John with Him."

"Pray, lest you enter into temptation," He gently and lovingly warned them all, as with His chosen three He separated from the rest. Sadly did they need to pray at that hour for the shadows of a great storm were fast thickening about them. They were that night to be tested to the breaking point. His words of warning spoken so shortly before must have been still ringing in their ears: "You will all be scandalized in My regard this night; for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd and the sheep shall be dispersed.'" They were astonished indeed at the suggestion of any unfaithfulness on their part, and rejected the thought of even the possibility of their deserting Him. Peter, who was to prove the weakest, was loudest and most emphatic in his protests of steadfast and sincere loyalty.

Our Lord, however, had listened in mournful silence to their protests and their vows. But now on parting from them for the struggle which was to begin, for the battle He was soon to fight, His love dictated a renewal of the warning. Possibly the sounds which reached Him from the city, and the moving lights in the Temple porches suggested the injunction, "Pray lest you enter into temptation." This same command was to be given later to the sleeping three when they were visited during the long hours of the agony under the olive trees in Gethsemani. The warning was to go unheeded, the suggestion of prayer necessary for their steadfastness was to be neglected, and so when the hour of trial came they were found wanting. When the

time for loyalty arrived, they turned their backs upon Him and fled from Him in fear of His enemies. Those who a few hours before had protested that they would be true to Him, that no danger would shake their constancy, no temptation weaken their allegiance, these few men abandoned Him and left Him in the hands of those who were seeking His life. They had neglected to pray, and their poor weak wills gave way shamefully in the moment when they were put to the test.

How different would be the story of our spiritual lives, if there were more prayer in them! The life of the soul without prayer is like the life of the body without food. The body without nourishment gradually grows weak and finally dies of starvation. So the soul without its spiritual nutriment grows inert, listless, frail, and if temptation comes spiritual death results. If our higher aims become blurred, if nobler motives no longer stir us to brave deeds, if the spiritual vision of other days becomes clouded and our wills feeble, if the relish for divine things grows poor, if meditation is distasteful and neglected and our attractions to the low and gross things of earth become more alluring, and our whole spiritual fibre seems to relax and we are dull to lofty motives and to Heavenly impulses, we shall find that the reason is because prayer and union with God are slipping out of our lives.

To use the figure of Holy Writ, the land of our spirit is becoming desolate because we do not think in our hearts, because we do not from time to time kneel before the Tabernacle strengthening our spiritual vision and energizing our enfeebled wills by dwelling in prayer on those spiritual principles and truths which are the food and nourishment of the soul, and are seen so clearly and realized so vividly under the light of the sanctuary lamp. As well try to see on a dark night without a light, as well try to run our trolleys without the current speeding through the wires, as well try to breathe and keep life in the

body without oxygen as to lead a prayerless spiritual life. A prayerless spiritual life is a contradiction in terms.

Prayer is needed not only to keep our souls alive but also to help us to cope with the obstacles which daily confront us and to withstand our enemies both within and without. Our inclinations gravitate to that which is low. Our vision is short-sighted, our wills are weak, the world and its attractions are dazzling and fascinating. What hope then will there be in hours of temptation, unless we prepare ourselves for the struggle by fortifying ourselves by fervent, habitual prayer! We read much nowadays about preparedness because of possible dangers which many imagine are not far distant, but no preparation against a foreign foe can be as necessary as the preparation which the soul must make against the temptations that continually confront it. Small wonder then, that our Blessed Saviour realizing so vividly the approach of His enemies, and knowing full well the timidity of His simple followers in the presence of Priests and Pharisees, small wonder then, I say, that He bade them pray.

Had they followed the wishes of His loving and sorrowing Heart how different had been the story of that sad night! How different, too, the story of the dead years of our lives had we heeded this same teaching of our Lord, and had we in the past prepared by fervent prayer against the temptations that assailed us! As it has been in the past, so shall it be in the future. If our days are empty, giddy, worldly, selfish and comfort-seeking, with more thought of frivolity than of faith, if we are more frequent at the theatre than at the altar, more concerned about the society of the world than about the society of the Saints, more solicitous about politics and even graft than about sanctifying grace and prayer, then we can expect that in the hour of temptation we shall show ourselves selfish cowards and turn our backs upon the Master who died for us.

## In the Shadows of Gethsemani

"**A**nd taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee He began to grow sorrowful and to be sad." The companions who saw our Lord raise Jairus's daughter from her bed of death, and who were the spectators of His glory on Thabor were admitted more fully into the secrets of this awful night of sorrow. As they had seen Him in all the beauty of His transfigured glory on the mountain where "His Face did shine as the sun," so now they were to be witnesses of His defeat in all the shame of His agony, when His Face was red with drops of the Precious Blood.

Our Blessed Saviour knew that His hour was come, and from that moment when in the Garden He allowed His three loving companions but the faintest glimpse at the dark shadows of sorrow that hung over His Heart by telling them "My soul is sorrowful even unto death," till the expiring cry on Mount Calvary died away on the darkened air, the chalice of suffering, pain and humiliation was pressed to His lips till the very dregs had been drained to the last drop. Having hinted at the storm of sorrow which was sweeping over His soul, He bade them tarry where they were and pray. Then "going a little further He fell flat upon His Face, saying My Father, if it be possible let this chalice pass from Me; nevertheless not as I will but as Thou wilt."

No wonder our Lord fell upon the earth and prayed. At the ninth hour on the morrow there was to be consummated on the cross the

crucifixion of His body, but under the olive trees crying piteously "Abba Father" there began the still more painful crucifixion of His soul. He had to face alone in the shadows and the darkness of the Garden the deepest desolation that ever swept over human spirit, the bitterest sorrow that ever flooded a human soul, the keenest grief that ever racked with paroxysms of pain a human life. All this He had to endure alone, and the shadows and darkness were the only witnesses of His overwhelming agony and humiliation. There was one, only one, who could console Him, His own sweet, pure Mother; but she is not with Him under the olive trees, but views with tear-stained eyes the scene in vision in the undisturbed quiet of the silent supper chamber. This battle He must fight alone. Only once in the history of the world has that cry of anguish, "My Father, if it be possible let this chalice pass from me," been forced from human lips and remained unheard, and He who uttered it was God's beloved Son, flat upon His face under Gethsemani's olive trees, on the last night of His life.

Who can tell the sufferings of the Sacred Heart in His agony? No angelic mind can sound its depths, no pen or word of seer or prophet can describe its intensity and bitterness. His "soul was sorrowful, even unto death." We have witnessed sorrows in the lives of those we have loved. Gladly we would have shed the tears and endured the anguish, but there has never been a sorrow like that of the divine Sufferer on Holy Thursday night in the Garden. We have stood over the open graves of dear ones, and have heard the clay falling so cruelly upon their coffins and we thought our hearts would break, and we felt that our grief was deep and that it bit sharply into our souls; but that grief did not kill, its sharp edge gradually wore away, the sighs grew softer and less frequent on our lips and the unbidden tears dried upon our cheeks; but the sorrow, the fear and the heaviness which that night hung over the strong, gentle soul of our Blessed Saviour were freighted

with cruel murder. They came and struck His spirit blows which naturally ought to have laid that sacred body lifeless at the foot of Mount Olivet. Think of Him who was eternal life, who was from the everlasting years, on the brink of the grave, conquered by death in His agony, had not the Father stayed the malignant power of His enemy till the ninth hour of the morrow on the cross.

Although there was enough of agony and suffering and grief flooding His soul and inundating His spirit, to steal away His precious life before He laid it down of His own accord on Good Friday, yet the arm of the evil one was held and he could not strike the death blow; our Blessed Saviour lived on to suffer and to die at the appointed moment. Mary was not childless that night. The Babe of Bethlehem, her beautiful Boy, her love, had yet another day of life. Before the set of sun on the next day He would be dead, bruised and mangled and killed, not by the cruel lashes and the nails but by the sorrow that was sweeping over Him as He whispered to His poor tired Apostles, "My soul is sorrowful even unto death."

Were His sorrows so great that night that death would have been a relief? Was He so exhausted from the emotions which had rushed in upon His spirit that like a tired child falling to sleep He fain would have bowed His head upon the green sward and given His spirit into the keeping of His Father? Would death have been sweet to that weary body and silent spirit? Possibly that sorrow-drenched soul yearned for the relief of death on that dreadful night. The tired eyes would not close, the blood-stained lips would not be dumb, the weary hands would not be quiet. No death could come till that sacred body had been racked with ten thousand pains and that spirit had been crushed with shame and the chalice of suffering had been drained to its lowest and bitterest dregs on Golgotha's height.

As He knelt in prayer "He began to fear and to grow heavy." Emotions of fear with all its alarms and shadows, desolation with all its disquiet and weariness took possession of His sorrowing soul. When he viewed the raging waves of the Lake and heard the shrieking of its angry winds and the tossing of its foam-fretted billows, at His word the waves fell, the sea was calm, the winds became hushed and silent as the quiet of a sleeping forest on a still, calm night. Now when a storm wilder than had ever raged on Genesareth's water swept over His spirit, no word of His was spoken to calm the angry billows that rolled in quick succession and cruelly buffeted His tormented soul. But why the fear, why the desolation? It must have been the dark, repulsive vision of sin which frightened and depressed our Blessed Saviour. He was the innocent, meek Lamb of God. His stainless human nature had never been touched by the blight of original sin. Actual sin could not taint that soul, purer than the driven snow on uncharted mountains, whiter than unsullied foam cresting the waves of the salt tropical sea. His spotless purity is beyond all words, beyond all thoughts.

The sanctity of angelic hosts and the unspeakable holiness of His own sweet Mother are but a blemish compared to the holiness of the soul of our Blessed Saviour. He the Man-God, the source of all sanctity, trembling in an agony of fear and depression at the sight of sin is the fountain and model of all purity and holiness. He was the only one of all the generations of men who in the fullest sense could challenge the world to convict Him of sin. He hates and loathes sin with an infinite hate and an infinite loathing, yet as He kneels under the olive trees the awful, terrifying vision of sin passes before Him, seizes upon Him with cruel grip and makes Him feel as if He were, what He never could be, a living breathing man of sin. Oh, the horror of the sight!

Glancing back over the dead centuries, He could see as they stood out before His mind as clearly as the waving branches of the olive trees in the moonlight, all the wickedness and transgressions of men. Back to the rebellion of the angels on the battlements of Heaven, and on through the dead years His mind travels. He sees Adam's fall in the Garden and the banishment of our first parents from the earthly paradise. He sees the whole human race, through Adam's failure, infected with the loathsome leprosy of original sin. He watches the growth of wickedness and lust eating into the lives of millions until His Father repents that He has created man. All the foulness and iniquities which brought on the flood rushed by Him that night stinging His innocent spirit like scorpions. The pride and ambition of the wicked builders of Babel's Tower moves by only to be replaced by the revolting vision of the revelry and iniquities of the cities of the Plain now buried under the salt waters of the Dead Sea.

Under His very eyes the fountains of fire break forth, burning forests crackle, the Jordan and the sea hiss, and vast clouds of hot steam burn the half-naked revellers as they rush in terror in long lines before Him, and He sees with infinite pain their souls dropping into hell. The picture of Baltassar's feast, with its drunkenness and impurity and its desecration of the holy vessels of the Sacred Temple, burns itself into His frightened soul. The sacrilege of that hideous night reminds Him of the terrible sacrilege of the morrow, and of the sacrileges that will stain the succeeding centuries by the neglect and profanation of His Most Precious Blood. The hardness of heart of the children of Israel, and their stubbornness and ingratitude and sin in the desert for forty years, hang over His Soul more clearly than the Paschal moon hangs in the sky that quiet night over the ill-fated Jerusalem. The sins of all mankind, not only in the past in all their number, kind and malice, but the awful sin of the morrow, and the uncounted sins of every yet

unborn age that is to live till the end of time, are pressed down upon His bent shoulders and made His own as He lies trembling with fear on the blood-stained grass.

He is drenched and saturated with crime. On Him have been laid the iniquities of us all. He recoils with horror from the impure sights before His eyes, the wild shouts of sin resound in His ears, its foul taste is upon His lips, its deadly touch is upon His Sacred Person. There is sin in His eyes, on His lips, on His hand. There is sin upon His garments. He is pressed down and overwhelmed with the vision of sin till He feels as if He were, what He never could be, one great loathsome sin under the anger of an all holy, infinite God. An angry Father, insatiable of reparation, stands over the victim of men's sins and claims full restitution. Infinite sanctity and God's justice exact the completest satisfaction. There is no time now for mercy, it is the moment of justice.

Our Saviour looked toward the morrow and drew back with trembling and fear. Before the moon sets behind Juda's hills He will be drenched with pain and humiliation, a faithless disciple will have imprinted a hypocritical traitor's kiss upon His blood-stained lips. Before unjust, jealous and cruel tribunals He will be hauled and treated with scorn and contempt. Betrayed, forsaken, bound; He will be hurried before Annas Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod and back again to Pilate. From insult to insult, from court to court, without respite, unrefreshed by food or sleep, His Sacred Flesh torn and mangled by whips and scourges, His Face crimsoned by blood-stains from the thorny crown, He will totter and fall in the sight of His Blessed Mother on the way to Calvary. Nailed to the cross amid the triumphant hootings of His enemies He will be left to die a death of shame. He knew that there was no capability of pain and shame which was not quickened and intensified by crucifixion. He knew that death by crucifixion gathers

up into itself and deepens every agony that man can inflict and man endure. No wonder then that He shrank back and trembled with fear at the thought of the shame, the burning thirst, the dizziness, the racking torture, no wonder that He trembled in every limb at the vision of the morrow's holocaust; and on down into the yet unrolled scroll of the centuries He peered, and saw so much that told Him His sacrifice would be in vain, His love unrequited. Can we marvel then that "He began to fear and to grow heavy"?

## The Struggle in the Darkness

Our Lord, having said to His Apostles, "My soul is sorrowful even unto death," reluctantly withdrew from the sustaining comfort of their presence, and falling "flat on the ground He prayed." Possibly He passed from the full moonlight into the deep shadows under the olive trees, and for a time His anxious companions could but dimly see Him lying quietly upon the cold, damp earth, at times rising upon His knees with arms outstretched in supplication, the silence broken ever and anon by snatches of His prayer as He pleaded, oh so piteously, that the chalice might pass from Him.

With what emotions His loved ones must have watched that agony, that awful death struggle! Only a few months ago they had seen His face on Thabor's heights shining like the sun, and now that Sacred Face is covered with tears and blood. They had seen Him in all the glory of His triumph on the mountain of Galilee, and now they are witnesses of all the shame and bitterness of His weakness and defeat. Under these strong emotions and exhausted by the tender feelings evoked in the supper chamber, it is not surprising that sleep crept over the weary and sorrowful Apostles in spite of their sympathy with their suffering Master; and so they saw perhaps only the early stages of the agony and heard only the first words of His prayer.

On during the long hours He prayed alone. In the darkness He cried out: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to Thee, remove this

chalice from Me; but not what I will, but what Thou wilt." How terrible this prayer if He who said, alluding to this hour, "I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished," must now beg the Father to take the chalice from His blood-stained lips! Possibly the chalice, for the removal of which He pleaded, was that His Blood would not be shed till the morrow at the ninth hour, and He was piteously imploring His Father to hasten the time of the great sacrifice when the last drop of His Blood would be poured out from His Sacred Heart.

Had He not said to Judas: "What thou dost, do quickly"? May we not think that the Father to some extent at least granted the request of His loving Son, that the Father could not resist the cry of anguish from those loved lips, and so to satisfy His yearning for the pains and humiliations of the morrow He allowed the Blood to burst through the pores of that Sacred Body, and, saturating His garments, to dye red the olive leaves and green grass upon which He knelt?

Arising he stumbled out from the shadows and sought His Apostles, sought them not once but thrice during this awful period of suspense. Only a short while ago He had said to them: "Stay you here and watch with Me." It ought not to have been difficult for them to have watched with Him. A mother will watch through the long night over her sick child. A friend will keep guard at the bedside of a sick and sleepless friend who is wearily waiting for the dawn; but under the olive trees the loved Master watched alone, forsaken and crushed under the weight of the Father's anger. "I looked for one that would grieve together with Me, but there was none; and for one that would comfort Me and I found none." Yet our Blessed Saviour did not complain, He seems rather to have excused them. "The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak." Overcome by the emotions to which