



The Prayer Collect will follow at the close of this devotion.

*23 And he said to them all, **If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. 24 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. 25 For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? 26 For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.** (Luke 9:23-26)*

Have you ever entertained the desire that Christ could have been spared the torment and anguish He suffered for you and me on the cross? If so, I hope you were not there on the Road to Calvary to play the devil's advocate, as did Peter, in advocating that the pains of the cross was far beneath the dignity of the Lord to suffer. Do you look to the life of joyous bliss to come with God in Heaven, yet fear the Great Divide (Death) that looms in the dark valley between? You, Christian Friend, have a cross to bear, and there can be no reward without the cross. The cross is our Guidepost to life. Several years ago, I read of travelers who were wandering the Alps of Switzerland between the two World Wars. At every turn in the mountain trails, if they look up and beyond, they would see a cross marking the way. Even if they looked back across the valley, there the cross also marked their beginning. At every waypoint another cross loomed in the distance to mark the safe way.

The precious young Maid of Orleans (Jean d'Arc) led the French to many victories as a seventeen year-old maiden. (Any who can lead the French to victory MUST have the help of God). She was captured, given a false trial, and burned at the stake at Vieux-Marche' in Rouen, on May 30, 1431. Her only request was that a cross be held before her perishing eyes as the flames consumed her body. Thus she died with her eyes concentrated on that cross which had made her free. What a wonderful legacy for her to have remained faithful to the last breath. How wonderful that Jesus never turned back from being the best of all Samaritans on going up to Jerusalem for the

sacrifice that would make us free in Him!

Does the season of Lent appear to you as a dark cloud of foreboding? Yes, we may so consider Lent in that dark light; however, it is a darkness whose end is not dark, but Light. The Light of the World must traverse the dark valley of death before bursting forth from the Garden Tomb in the brilliance of a thousand suns on Easter morning. Had He stopped short and lingered in the dark valley, or retraced His steps back from that Jerusalem journey, you and I would remain forever in the chains of our sins. BUT HE DID NOT! *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain* (Eccl 12:1-2) When the sky is blackened by the clouds of the storm, on such a dark and cloudy day, can we not look forward to the breaking forth of the sun in all its splendor. So far there has never been a dark cloud that never dissipated. We have not seen the last of the dark cloud even if the sun shines brightly, but it never lasts more than a fortnight.

And may I ask, if it is the cloud you dread, what is so awful about a cloud? Do you remember how we last saw Christ? Was He not received up into a cloud? If Christ is in the cloud, there may also be found joy unspeakable there. ".....*while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.*" (Acts 1:9) Though our Lenten colors are dark, white is our color for Easter – spotless and without shadow of any darkness. Light may go unnoticed on a bright sunny day, but in the darkness, it is astounding and brilliant. *We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts* (2 Peter 1:19)

I have heard some, even good and respected theologians, argue that Jesus did not know that He would die by means of crucifixion until the very end. I adamantly disagree with that notion and believe it to be unscriptural. Christ KNEW what awaited Him at Jerusalem, and so informed His disciples. Even after hearing, it was His DISCIPLES that did not understand. Jesus was traveling up the Jerusalem Road to seal our hopes of salvation. He was fully aware that there could be no other way than by the means of the cross. He never debated the issue in His Holy Mind, but was immovably resolved by His love for us to proceed according to the decision of the Great Council of Heaven. *And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem* (Luke 9:51)

During Lent, it is not the Hurt which our Lord suffered for which we mourn and fast, but it is for our own sins that placed Jesus in the hurt of the cross for which we must mourn and fast. Before He could redeem us of those sins, it was necessary for Him to satisfy the justice of God and pay the wages of our sins (not His) which is death. A good soldier, facing the dangers of battle, looks straight ahead to the enemy's battle line and never casts a wavering glance back at the reserve position. Christ was our good Soldier – our Battle Hero. He took on all the darkness and pain that Satan had to offer, and walked away, three days later, the Victor of Redemption. He left His enemy, and ours, crumpled on the battlefield, never to taste the scent of victory - for all of the victory was in Christ!

The Third Sunday in Lent.
The Collect.

WE beseech thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of thy humble servants, and stretch forth the right hand of thy Majesty, to be our defence against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The first day of Lent, commonly called
Ash Wednesday.

The Collect.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all those who are penitent; Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

¶ This Collect is to be said every day in Lent, after the Collect appointed for the day, until Palm Sunday.