

Front Street Prodigal

A True Story

It isn't fashionable these days to believe in miracles, unless they're the contrived and sensational kind that atomic physicists and such fellows occasionally (and quite literally) raise their hands to. But real, honest-to-God miracles do happen, miracles that Einstein, Urey and plutonium have nothing to do with, even in this solidly materialistic year of our Lord, 1946. Would you like to hear about one?

Rochester — yes, Rochester, State of New York, United States of America — was cold and dreary that January morning. So was the bum who sat shivering in an unheated shelter on Front Street, turning over the three nickels in the pocket of his G. I. trousers and contemplating his past, present and future.

Besides being cold and wet and dreary, the bum was sick; physically sick with a virulent specimen of gonorrhea; mentally sick with worry about his past, disgraced with his present, despair over his future; morally sick as only an apostate Catholic can be.

Something Happened
Six years before he had been despite his youth, a nationally known writer, editor and lecturer, publicly commended by his own Archbishop for his work among the poor and as a leader in Catholic Action, slated to become a member of a great religious community.

Something had happened; even a bum himself did not know what. And now — He was friendless, having betrayed and bamboozled his best and dearest friends (if they had not been such good friends, he'd have been wearing convict garb).

His family had disowned him; in a last surge of decency, he'd changed his name, to save them at least a little pain and disgrace. He was without money or position, having drunk himself out of both — and out of the possibility (human) of regaining either. The only clothes he owned were those he wore, and they were very dirty.

Three Short Beers
After a while the bum got up, wandered down to the corner of Main Street, and began walking aimlessly along that thoroughfare, wondering whether to spend his last fifteen cents on three short beers, which would be no help whatever, and what he would do when that small sum was gone. The idea of food never entered his mind.

He kept on walking until it occurred to him that he was near a church whose pastor he had never met, and therefore hadn't touched for a "loan."

After all, even a buck would help. He turned his steps towards the rectory. Some impulse seized him, and he decided to take a look at the church first. Facing the high altar, he uttered a wordless prayer, why he did not know the rectory, and the miracle happened. Instead of the sales talk already prepared in his mind, he found himself telling this good pastor, the Truth. Not the whole truth, but enough of it so that his listener could guess the rest.

Catholic Poetry Society Plans 15th Anniversary
New York — To celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of its founding, the Catholic Poetry Society of America, 333 4th Avenue, New York City, announces that it will hold a Congress on Poetry, Sunday, April 28, at which it will issue a Manifesto: "A Reaffirmation of Poetic Values."

The Congress, which will be under the patronage of His Eminence Francis Cardinal Spellman, will be opened with a Solemn High Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral. All other events of the day are scheduled for Hunter College, East 86th Street, between Park and Lexington Avenues.

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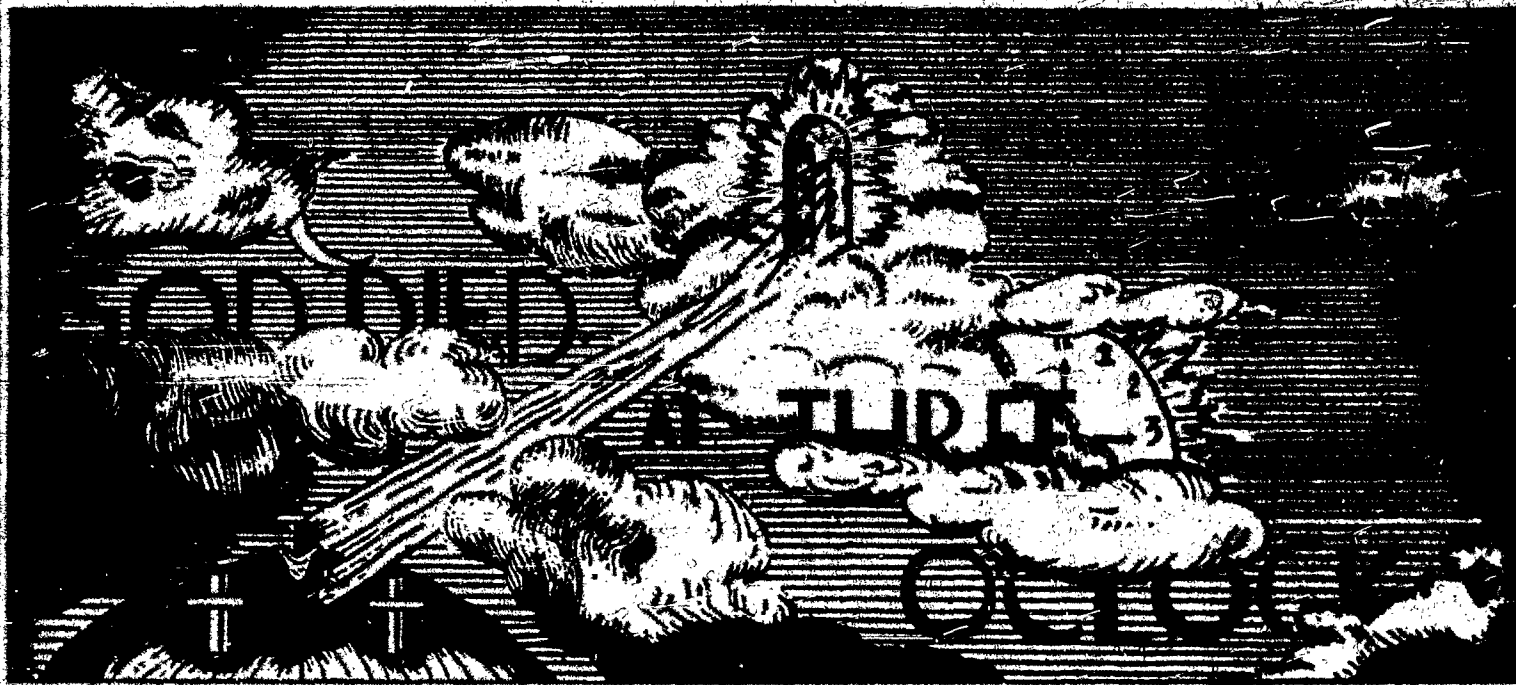
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THE STORY UP TO NOW

By the Reverend Gerald T. Brennan

IX—His Mother
"You must go to the cross!" The Son of God must die like a criminal. He will be nailed to a cross.

Jesus hears the cruel words of Pilate. He listens for some word of protest, but he hears none. Closing his eyes, Jesus sees the events of the past three years flash through his mind. He sees the ten lepers whom He cured. The dead man whom He brought back to life! The five thousand whom He fed by a miracle! The blind beggar to whom He gave sight! He sees Himself entering Jerusalem while the people cheer and call Him a King. Where are all these people today? Now Christ is friendless. Now He has only enemies. Alone and hated, He stands a Prisoner, condemned to death. Jesus is willing to die. He is willing, because it is His Father's wish. Jesus finds no fault with the sentence of death. There is no hatred in His heart. Instead, He pities Pilate. He is sorry for His enemies. Calphas and the Jewish leaders. Jesus stands in the courtyard ready and waiting for the cross.

In a few minutes, two of the soldiers step forth and take the scarlet cloak from Christ's shoulders. Then the Prisoner is given back His own clothes. His own cloak covers His wounded and bleeding body for the journey to death.

Now the crowd is anxious to see the end. The day grows warm and the slight drizzle makes the onlookers impatient.

Sign of Victory
Suddenly the crowd is silent. Every eye turns from Christ to watch the soldiers carrying forth a heavy cross. Making their way through the crowd, the soldiers stop before Christ and rest the cross upon His ground.

Jesus looks silently at this evil cross and says nothing. Soon He will be nailed to this cross. Soon He will die upon it in shame. But this ugly cross of shame will also be Christ's sign of victory! Long after His death, this cross will stand in every corner of the world. This cross will be the sign of hope and joy to all men. The cross of Christ will preach hatred for sin and love for God. The story of the cross will be the story of God's love for the world. The soldiers place the cross upon Christ's shoulders. It is a heavy load for a weak man to carry, but Jesus manages the load without help. He follows the soldiers and guards as they lead Him through the streets of Jerusalem.

The city of Jerusalem is crowded with the sentence of death. There is no hatred in His heart. Instead, He pities Pilate. He is sorry for His enemies. Calphas and the Jewish leaders. Jesus stands in the courtyard ready and waiting for the cross.

Give No Rest
The soldiers lift the cross and Jesus staggers slowly to His feet. He is given no chance to rest. Once again, the cross is placed upon His shoulders. Tired and weary, faint from hunger and thirst, Jesus struggles ahead with His heavy load.

Now and then, Christ glances at the people who line the streets. He searches through blood-filled eyes for one kindly face. But these faces staring at Him show mostly hate. Some show scorn. Some show fear. Only a few show pity.

At the corner of a narrow alley, Jesus now halts His slow and painful steps. At last He sees before Him some friendly figure. Standing in the street is His Mother, Mary. With Her are His Apostles John and other friends.

Mother and Son! These two love each other. It is a bitter meeting for both of them. Mary is losing Christ! The soldiers are taking Him away to death. What will the Mother and Son say to each other? What can they say?

Mary does not speak. Neither does Christ. Each knows the thoughts of the other. Words are not necessary. They speak only with their eyes. Only with their hearts.

The soldiers urge Christ onward. Again He seems to lose His balance and almost falls but somehow He is able to steady Himself. He is losing strength rapidly now. The soldiers watch Him closely. Will their Prisoner be able to reach Calvary? Will He die in the street and cheat the cross?

If Christ is to be saved the death on Calvary, somebody must carry the cross for Him the rest of the way. He is too weak now to carry His cross alone.

X—Veronica
It is late morning and the warm sun beats heavily upon the Man with the cross. Every step is one of agony. The heavy cross, cutting His shoulders, makes Him ache with pain. His face is dirty, His eyes swollen and red, and the crown of thorns digs deeply into His tender skin. Jesus Christ is a sad picture—suffering as no other man ever suffered—but He struggles to reach Calvary. He begs for no mercy. He expects no mercy. He walks through the streets with a prayer in His heart, a prayer that His Father will give Him strength to walk the last half mile to Calvary.

Most of the people who watch the suffering Christ seem cold-hearted. Only a few in the crowd feel sorry for Him—some of the women cannot bear the sight of the Man of Sorrows and turn their heads away. Others weep silently and want to help, but they are afraid. But there is one woman in the crowd who is not afraid. Her name is Veronica.

Veronica sees Jesus and her heart goes out to Him. Her first thought is to help. But what can she do? In an instant, a thought flashes through the woman's mind. Veronica forgets about the crowd. She forgets the soldiers and guards. She sees only Christ.

Leaving the crowd, Veronica rushes into the street toward Christ. She wipes His blood-stained face with a white cloth. The guards shout angrily. They treat Veronica roughly and push her aside. The procession moves forward.

Veronica, with tears in her eyes, watches the procession disappear down the narrow street. As she turns to enter the house, she opens her cloth, and there on the cloth is a picture—it is the face of Christ!

Proof of Gratitude
Then Veronica remembers that Jesus did not speak to her, but her piece of cloth is proof that she carried the Cross of Christ!

When this day is ended, only Simon, the stranger, can help. The soldiers do not argue with the stranger. They ignore Simon's protests and arguments. They force him to carry the cross upon which Christ will die.

Carrying the cross, Simon of Cyrene walks in shame behind Christ. But someday Simon will be proud of this hour. Proud that he was chosen to walk in the blood-stained footsteps of Jesus Christ on this Friday morning.

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Some of the women, feeling that the soldiers are too cruel, cry out against them. But the cries of the women do not disturb the soldiers.

Jesus, however, is grateful. He sees that the women are helping Him. He knows that their prayers are helping Him. He knows that their love is helping Him. He knows that their faith is helping Him. He knows that their hope is helping Him. He knows that their charity is helping Him. He knows that their mercy is helping Him. He knows that their kindness is helping Him. He knows that their gentleness is helping Him. He knows that their meekness is helping Him. He knows that their patience is helping Him. He knows that their self-control is helping Him. He knows that their purity is helping Him. He knows that their peace is helping Him. He knows that their joy is helping Him. He knows that their love is helping Him. He knows that their grace is helping Him. He knows that their mercy is helping Him. He knows that their kindness is helping Him. He knows that their gentleness is helping Him. He knows that their meekness is helping Him. He knows that their patience is helping Him. He knows that their self-control is helping Him. He knows that their purity is helping Him. He knows that their peace is helping Him. He knows that their joy is helping Him. He knows that their love is helping Him. He knows that their grace is helping Him.

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