

1979

Sermons of Father Laval (Editor: Fr. Lécuyer)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-papers>

 Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(1979). Sermons of Father Laval (Editor: Fr. Lécuyer). *Spiritan Papers*, 9 (9). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-papers/vol9/iss9/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Spiritan Collection at Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spiritan Papers by an authorized editor of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.

FATHER LAVAL'S SERMONS

Among the writings of Father Laval which were gathered together for the process of his beatification there are some sermons. It would be more exact to say: some plans for sermons, since, in most cases, they are no more than brief notes or outlines to serve as reminders to the preacher of the points he wanted to touch upon. Father Laval often drew these plans in Latin of a type similar to that he used for his class notes during his days at St. Sulpice Seminary, some of which we still have. In some instances one might wonder whether they are really sermon outlines or simply notes Father Laval wrote in order to prepare his meditation.

Here is a brief inventory of what we have. When titles are given, we shall italicise them.

1) *Oportuit Mariam pati et ita intrare in gloriam* (Mary had to suffer in order to enter into glory). The place of the cross in Mary's life. Father deals with four sorrowful events during the infancy of Jesus: *a)* Jesus' birth in the poverty of the stable of Bethlehem; *b)* the prophecy of Simeon; *c)* the flight into Egypt; *d)* Jesus lost and then found in the temple (pp. 201-212).

2) *Septem verba B.M. Virginis, quae sunt septem flammae* (seven words of the Virgin which are seven flames of love). Father Laval summarizes in a few lines the text of a sermon by Saint Bernardine of Siena (Sermon 9 on the Visitation). Until recently, this sermon was to be found in the Proper of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost for the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (p. 202).

3) *Festum Rosarii*. An outline in Latin of a sermon which must date from 1850 or 1851. It has three parts: *a)* It is the Rosary which has brought about the conversion of the Island of Mauritius; *b)* the Rosary as a means of perseverance; *c)* the Rosary as the pledge of a happy death (pp. 203-204).

4) *An Analysis of the Catechism of the Council of Trent.* We have only the beginning, along with a brief analysis in Latin of the first words of the Credo (pp. 205-206).

5) *The Sacrament of Penance.* This is a brief plan for simple instructions on the Sacrament of Penance: Examination of Conscience, Contrition, Confession, Penance, Manner of making one's confession (pp. 207-208).

6) *Festum Omnium Sanctorum.* A few lines, written in a mixture of French and Latin. Is it a plan for personal meditation or for a sermon (p. 208)?

7) *Why does Father Laval no longer give warnings like he used to?* The missionary compares the fervor of the early days of conversion with the negligence of a great number nowadays (pp. 209-212).

8) *Homily for the 5th Sunday after Epiphany.* On the parable of the weed and the good grain. Very brief outline. We must avoid bad companions (pp. 213-214).

9) *Perseverance.* Very brief outline, written in a mixture of French and Latin: necessity of perseverance; means for persevering (p. 215).

10) *Cruces Mariae.* Latin title, but the development is in French. Just as for Mary, it is by the Cross that we can arrive at glory. Mary's cross in the temple at Jerusalem (Simeon's prophecy); Mary's cross during the flight into Egypt and the exile there (pp. 216-224).

11) *Oportet Mariam pati et ita intrare in gloriam.* The beginning shows that it was a sermon for the Feast of the Ascension. Jesus has gone up to heaven and we must follow Him; but, like Mary herself, we can follow Him only by the way of the Cross. Father Laval examines five occasions on which Mary found the Cross: *a)* in Nazareth; *b)* in Bethlehem; *c)* in the temple at Jerusalem; *d)* in Egypt; *e)* on Calvary. The last part was used as a separate sermon for the last day of the Month of Mary (pp. 225-245).

12) *The Fifth Cross.* A slightly different version of the last part of the preceding sermon. Mary's sufferings during the Way of the Cross and on Calvary (pp. 245-254).

13) no title. A collection in Latin of texts from the Gospels which are the basis for sermons on Mary's crosses.

14) *Way of the Cross.* After an introduction on the manner of making the Way of the Cross, Father Laval gives several

very brief outlines in Latin for this exercise of piety. Thus there are Ways of the Cross *a)* on the love of Christ; *b)* another one on the love of Christ; *c)* on contrition; *d)* on patience; *e)* on the soul's salvation; *f)* another one on patience; *g)* without a title (also on patience) (pp. 254-264).

15) *On the Rosary*. Outlines for meditations on the mysteries of the Rosary, written in Latin: *a)* to obtain a happy death; *b)* on the Precious Blood; *c)* on Mary's death and burial; *d)* no title (on Mary's death); *e)* no title (for a happy death); *f)* for holy purity; *g)* no title (on the last judgment and the glorification of Mary) (pp. 265-276).

16) The last two pages, written in Latin, lack any title and are a collection of sentences of which some are taken from the Bible and from the Liturgy. The principal idea seems to be preparation for a happy death. The final lines are the text of the Collect from the Mass of St. Louis, King of France, patron of the Diocese of Mauritius (pp. 276-277).

At the end of this inventory, we can make the following comments:

1) We can see the absolutely privileged place given to the theme of Mary's suffering: fifty-one pages out of seventy-eight in the collection. Evidently we have here only a very small part of the sermons of Father Laval,—a few remains saved from destruction . . . Still, it seems that we have here a precious bit of evidence of the missionary's personal devotion.

2) The second most frequent theme, and one which is in close relation to the first, is that of the Passion, especially in the exercise of the Way of the Cross (10 pages).

3) We have already said that these sermon outlines are often only very brief notes. The fully developed sermons give a good idea of Father Laval's style of preaching: a very simple style, usually closely following the Gospel, and interspersed with exhortations and short prayers. Father sometimes adds some popular legends, but he always alerts his hearers to what these are; e.g. the story of the brigands who are supposed to have attacked the Holy Family during the flight into Egypt (pp. 221, 234).

To conclude, and to give a good example of Father Laval's preaching, here is the beginning of the sermon for the Feast of the Ascension which we mentioned above.

OPORTET MARIAM PATI ET ITA INTRARE IN GLORIAM

Today, my dear children, we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension of the Savior, a day of joy and of hope for all the children of God and of Mary.

Yes, we rejoice, because Our Lord Jesus Christ has gone to take possession of his kingdom and to prepare a place in the heavenly homeland for all his faithful servants. "Holy Father", the Savior said to His Father, "*I have accomplished the task you gave me to do; I have made known your adorable name to men of good will; I have snatched the children of Adam from the slavery of the demon; I have set them free; I have reconciled them with your justice; I have closed hell, opened heaven; now, Father, I am returning to you, and I wish that where I am, there my faithful servants may be also*" (cf. John 17:4 . . . 24).

Yes, dear children, let us rejoice, because we all have a place in heaven; our names are written in the book of life; there is a throne and an immortal crown reserved for us in the heavenly homeland; Yes, one day we shall be kings.

It is there that Jesus Christ is waiting for us after the exile of this life; it is there that we shall have the happiness of seeing our good Mother, the Virgin Mary, seated upon a throne and crowned with immortality, raised higher than all the angels and saints and placed right near Jesus Christ her divine Son. With her we shall sing eternally of the mercies of the Lord. But, by what road did Mary herself reach such glory and happiness? By what road did our Mother herself reach heaven, and by what road shall we, her children, get there?

By what road did Mary reach heaven? Alas! by the little rough and narrow road of the cross, by the same road as Jesus Christ her Son. There is no other road that leads to happiness: *oportuit Mariam pati et ita intrare in gloriam . . .* by the cross: *oportet Mariam pati . . . in gloriam*.

How can that be? Mary was the Immaculate Virgin, conceived without sin, blessed among all women, Mother of the Savior of the world, but even she had to suffer in order to enter into glory? Yes: it is true that, by an extraordinary privilege, God preserved her from every stain of sin which weighs upon all the children of Adam, but He did not will to exempt her from the cross, because it is written that all those whom

God has predestined for heaven He makes like unto Jesus Christ suffering. Yes, it is an unchangeable divine law that, in order to share in the Savior's glory in heaven, we must share in His sufferings on earth. Yes, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and to win it we must suffer. Yes, if we are to go and join Jesus Christ in glory, we must carry His cross: "if anyone will come after me, . . .", etc.

So Mary had to walk the way of the cross to get to heaven. Yes, she walked it for the sixty-three years she was on earth; Yes, heaven was given to Mary only because she walked along the *via dolorosa*. Today, my children, let us meditate together upon our good Mother. The holy Spirit says to us: "*Don't forget the sufferings of your mother*" (*cf.* Sirach 7:29) . . .