

## The History of the Catholic Church

### The 14<sup>th</sup> Century: The Black Death

#### Events:

1300: Pope Boniface VIII calls the first Jubilee year.

1305-1314: The trials of the Knights Templar eventually caused their dissolution.

1309-1377: The Avignon Papacy begins.

1315-1317: The Great Famine killed many in Europe.

1320: Wladyslaw I the Elbow-high is crowned king of Poland uniting the kingdom

1325: The City of Tenochtitlan is founded.

1335: The death of Ilkhan Abu Sald causes the disintegration of the Mongol rule in Persia.

1337: The "Hundred Year's War" begins between England and France.

1346: The Battle of Crecy: a major point in the Hundred Year's War where the English defeat the French using longbows.

1347-1351: The Black Death kills 25 million and 1/3 of the population of Europe.

1356: The Imperial Diet of the Holy Roman Empire by Emperor Charles VI creates an electoral college for electing future emperors.

1357: Scotland becomes independent.

1363: The Battle of Lake Poyang: a naval battle between Chinese rebel groups. The largest naval battle in history.

1368: The end of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty in China.

1371: The Battle of Maritsa: the Serbs are defeated by the Ottomans.

1378: The Great Schism of the West splits the popes between Avignon France and Rome, Italy. The Council of Constance resolves this split in 1417.

1381: John Wycliffe is dismissed from Oxford University for his criticisms of the Catholic Church.

1381: The Peasant revolt in England.

1385: The Battle of Aljubarrota: between Portugal and Castille maintaining Portugal's independence.

1391: Anti-Jewish pogroms spread throughout Spain and Portugal leading to the massacre of thousands of Jews.

1396: The Ottomans defeat a large army of crusaders

1396: The Second Bulgarian Empire ends.

Notable inventions: The longbow, the pound lock

### **Politics**

The 14<sup>th</sup> century is the most devastating century we have covered and in the top five in history. Amidst all the political turmoil of ages past and the constant wars between nations, Europe experiences an unusually cold winter followed by wet summers for 2 years. This drastic change in weather caused crop yields to plummet. Crop yields dropped by about 50 % across all of Europe from England to Germany, from southern Finland to Italy. Basically all of Europe was affected by these weather patterns. Due to the loss of crops, the cost of fish and wheat skyrocketed by 500%. Since most people were peasant farmers, they couldn't afford this drastic increase in the cost of food. Some economists estimate that 10% of the population died due to starvation. In many religious houses, monks and nuns died of starvation.

### **The Hundred Years War**

Although historians gave the “war” this name, the actual length of the war is 116 years and had many moments of peace but also greatly devastated Europe. The conflict began many centuries ago when England fought and controlled land that was originally French. As originally part of France, this piece of land paid tribute to France which greatly disturbed the English king. From these early moments disputes continued to arise over the rightful king of France, the most powerful nation in Europe. The dispute came to a fore in the 14<sup>th</sup> century when King Charles IV of France died with no heirs and no brothers. His closest heir was Edward III of England whose mother, Isabella, was Charles' sister. The French nobility didn't want the French crown to fall into English hands so they decided that a French nobleman must take the throne.

The Hundred Years War is a complex series of battles over the rightful ruler of France. Throughout the next 116 years, several battles will take place, many peace treaties will be signed and eventually the conflict will come to an end. The Black Death and many other major issues throughout Europe will cause the war to halt for a while with tensions growing during the intercession. The war largely came to an end at the Battle of Castillon when both armies had largely spent all their resources and the English had political turmoil at home. The war almost begun again two more conflicts between 1447 and 1477 but no formal war broke out. No formal peace treaty was signed and the two countries remained at war 20 years after the Battle of Castillon.

The Hundred Years War led to many important military inventions. In England the use of the longbow gave greater range to archers and a heavy advantage in the early stages of the war. Between the mid-point and end of the war artillery was developed with devastating results. This war was not simply a power struggle but also greatly innovative and set the stage for future European conflicts.

### **The Black Death**

No event in the history of the Middle Ages is more significant than the Black Death. Originating in China at some point around the 1330's the disease continued to spread west. Most historians accept the hypothesis that the plague was caused by a bacterium that lived in rodents and fleas. With low sanitation across all aspects of life, the disease spread rampantly wherever it went. Historians can watch the spread of the disease through the historical records as it moved from China, to Persian, to the Turks and Ottomans, and then to Europe. At the point of its entrance into Europe, the Tartars were fighting the Genoese and a group of merchants were taking refuge in the sieged city. The disease hit the Tartars with devastating force. Almost the entire army was wiped out. So many died that a contemporary report told the story of the Tartars having no way to dispose of so many dead bodies so they catapulted them over the wall of the sieged city. The inhabitants record that it was like it was raining dead bodies upon them. The city stunk of rotting flesh that the rivers couldn't take away all the dead bodies. The city was sieged when the inhabitants fell ill and died.

The plague devastated Europe. Estimates suggest that around 1/3 of the population, roughly 25 million, died. Some places were harder hit with death tolls around 70-80%. Cemeteries were burying around 500 bodies a day. We cannot estimate the economic and political toll the Black Death had on Europe.

The Black Death caused a new and massive wave of antisemitism across Europe. As people died from the plague, many noticed that the Jews started drinking from wells outside the city and not the common wells. Many began to believe that the Jews poisoned the well water and caused the plague. Throughout Europe persecutions began. In Spain, pogroms, which are concerted efforts to massacre a group of people, led to death of thousands of Jews.

King Charles VI called an Imperial Diet in 1356 to work through issues in the Empire namely the election of the next Holy Roman Emperor. A diet is when the nobles of a region gather to discuss issues related to their realm. The use of diets to deal with matters in the German part of Europe date to the 8<sup>th</sup> century. As the diets became more common and the world centered more on the Holy Roman Empire, nations gathered for the diet and to discuss matters of governance like the one called by King Charles VI. The particular diet of 1356 attempted to put rules into place for electing the next Holy Roman Emperor taking the decision from the hands of the papacy.

In the Iberian Peninsula, peace continued between Christians and Muslims. Spain went to war with Portugal and lost giving Portugal their independence. In the east, the Mongol Empire is falling apart as the Chinese become independent, the Persians fight against them, and the Ottoman Empire rises to power. The Ottomans will fight the Turks and Israel over the course of this century halted by the Plague.

### **Church:**

The 14<sup>th</sup> century church is in chaos. The century began with an incredible innovation and high point: the first Jubilee Year called by Pope Boniface VIII. This extraordinary move was meant to bolster hope and encourage people as a new century dawned.

The world only shifted and tuned from that Holy Year. Two major natural events devastated the church. The first was the great famine of 1315-1317. This famine would cause a 50% reduction in food and an increase of 500% in price. The people most greatly affected were the poor and the religious. In many religious houses, monks and nuns starved to death. In one monastery 3 abbesses died of starvation. Many houses sold land or went into debt trying to provide enough food for the religious. Across Europe people were beginning to see the signs predicted by the Book of Revelation. Yet nothing prepared them for the Black Death. Although most historians focus on the social impact of the Black Death, I want to focus on the religious impact. The religious houses of Europe, as with everyone, were hit hard. Many of them lost over 50% of their religious. These numbers would recover by 75% in 20 years. Nevertheless,, people flocked to churches with the hopes of redemption. New hymns like the Stabat Mater became popular as people were wrestling with suffering and redemption. The clergy were decimated with between 50 and 60% of priests dying during this plague. Most people thought that the end times had come.

In the midst of the challenges of both the famine and the plague, the church greatly developed a long-standing understanding of purgatory. Even though the reformers and heretics of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century tried to deny the existence of purgatory, the idea was deeply ingrained in the minds of the people. With death and destruction a common experience for medieval peoples, the idea that they could help their loved ones after death and prepare for Heaven while alive on earth brought mission and comfort. During these major challenges, the church preached heavily the dogma of purgatory, the idea of redemption, and the importance of good works. Many people sought to care for the sick, to engage in the acts of indulgences, and to work toward their redemption. Out of this new fervor came a focus on personal holiness and the individual's task of working toward their own redemption. Major movements and works like lay apostolates and *The Imitation of Christ* captivated and motivated many people.

#### The Avignon Papacy:

Many people assume that the Pope chose to move to Avignon, France. The situation is much simpler and complex than that. Pope Boniface VIII died a tragic death at the hands of French henchmen. The horrors of his death left the papacy in disarray. His successor, Pope Benedict XI, died after 8 months in office. When the cardinals got together to elect a new pope, the French had the political advantage and named the Archbishop of Bordeaux, not a cardinal, as pope. He took the name Clement V. Having resided in France and concerned about the political situation in Rome, he never made it to Rome. Instead, after being crowned Pope, he wandered around France looking for a place to reside. Eventually he settled upon Avignon at a Dominican Friary. From there he led the official business of the Church as the Bishop of Rome. Note: he never removed his title as bishop of Rome nor was he ever considered to not be the pope. The next seven popes would continue to reign from Avignon, France most of whom will never step foot in Rome.

After several attempts by the last two of the Avignon popes, Pope Gregory XI finally arrived back in Rome and the time for the popes in France had come to an end. Eight months after Pope Gregory XI arrived he died leaving the church in a strange place. The cardinals hastened the

election of the next pope, defying canon law, and while they were processing in for the conclave, the Italians were chanting “we want a Roman!” They elected a Roman who took the name Urban VI. Almost immediately he began reforms including chastising the cardinals for opulence, halting income to bishops who were away from their diocese, and publicly berated the cardinals for their political behaviors. This greatly angered the cardinals. They called the pope to a meeting at Fondi. Fearing that he would be beaten by them, he refused to come and took up residence in the Castel Sant’Angelo. The cardinals, however, fled the city and called another conclave. They nullified the election of Pope Urban claiming fear of retaliation by the Romans and elected Pope Clement V who would reside in the Avignon palace. Now there are two claimants to the throne of Peter: one in Rome and one in Avignon, France. These divisions will continue until the Council of Constance in 1415.

### **Spirituality:**

After many centuries without much development in Christian spirituality, the 14<sup>th</sup> century sees a boom in new ideas and a wave of new inspiration. The combination of the Black Death and the many wars sparked new ideas in the minds of the Christians. Although many feared the end of the world, the most significant innovation was suffering as redemptive and the necessity of personal holiness. As 25 million or 1/3 of Europe died in the pandemic, people were deeply worried about the state of their souls and the life to come. Many sought indulgences to help ward off the effects of sin and its punishment leading to a wave of popular devotion to indulgences. The second wave was union with Christ’s sufferings. Art, music, and the messages from the Church all centered on union with Christ in his sufferings as redemptive.

Off in the north a new movement was forming for the laity to focus on personal growth. The Brothers of the Common Life formed in Holland as a lay movement to encourage personal holiness. The idea of personal holiness will lead to one of the great works of spirituality *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas á Kempis.

After two centuries of intellectual development in the universities and the church, the 14<sup>th</sup> century sees a wave of mysticism. Mysticism is not new in the Christian tradition and was very common in the early church. Yet waves of intellectual development and the constant chaos of the church led to a diminishment of its value. The 14<sup>th</sup> century experiences a new wave in the desire and importance of the mystical side of spirituality in people like St. Catherine of Sienna. The idea of spiritual union with Christ, experiencing the heavenly realities, and seeking higher realms of union with God through prayer become more common throughout the church.

### **Heresies:**

**Nationalism:** The major war between France and England caused people to take sides in the ever growing conflict. Yet, the sides people took were not the normal double allegiance to the Pope and the King. Instead they sided more with their political rulers leading to the idea of nationalism. The main heresy denounces the idea of a universal kingdom ruled by the pope in favor of a particular kingdom which is ruled by a sovereign. Therefore people began to side against the pope and church in favor of their political ruler.

Nominalism: Started by William of Occam, the idea of nominalism denounces the idea of universals. The only reality is that of the individual. Things do not hold universally across all humans and therefore all the universe centers on the individual. The Nominalist's conclusions are that God's ways are unknowable and hidden and therefore we cannot possibly understand God nor shall we try. The universe is unknowable, unreasonable, and doesn't care about our survival. Thoughts such as these led many to leave the Church.

John Wycliff: John's teachings of the centrality of Scripture in the life of faith, the condemnation of the church and the clergy as anti-tradition, and the claim that the church is not an institution were condemned by the Church. Wycliffe's idea will spawn the Protestant reformation in about two centuries.

### Key People:

Dante Alighieri: Born in Florence around 1265. At the age of 10 his mother died and his father took a second wife giving Dante two-half siblings. Much of Dante's life is rather obscure. He never studied at the universities or was formally educated but took part in public debates and studied on his own. He is one of the first writers to write poems and literature in the vernacular, Italian. His major work, *the Divine Comedy*, set the stage for a new kind of literature. Dante got involved with the Italian politics and was eventually exiled both by his enemies and for failing to pay a fine which he thought he was innocent. Disillusioned by the political fighting, he remained in exile for the rest of his life.

John Wycliff: John was born in the village of Hipswell in England. Much of his early life before coming to the University of Oxford is unknown. Scholars assume that he was educated close to his home. John became involved with several issues of his time. The few notable ones included starting a movement that thought the 14<sup>th</sup> century was the end of the world, a common idea of the time. He was on a commission to discuss the relationship between the king and the pope. John's ideas that the clergy had too much power led him to a trial with the Bishop of London. Party lines were clearly drawn during the trial. Following the trial, John continued to write books denouncing the power of the clergy leading to opposition by the clergy. On May 22, 1377, Pope Gregory XI wrote a bull against Wycliffe denouncing his ideas. Tensions continued to grow leading to a Synod to condemn his ideas, expulsion from Oxford University, and John continuing to argue against the papacy, monasticism, and the priestly office.

St. Elizabeth of Portugal: At her birth in 1271, her father Pedro III, the future king of Aragon, reconciled with his father James. These healthy influences led her to a life of spirituality and self-discipline. At the age of 12, she was given in marriage to Denis, King of Portugal. She spent her life focusing on love of God, care for pilgrims, strangers, sick and the poor, spiritual piety including daily Mass, and conversion of her husband. She remained devoted to her husband despite whose infidelity was a scandal for the kingdom. He eventually gave up this sin after years of fidelity and prayers from Elizabeth. At the death of her husband, tensions flared between her son and Denis' illegitimate son. She was able to establish peace between them.

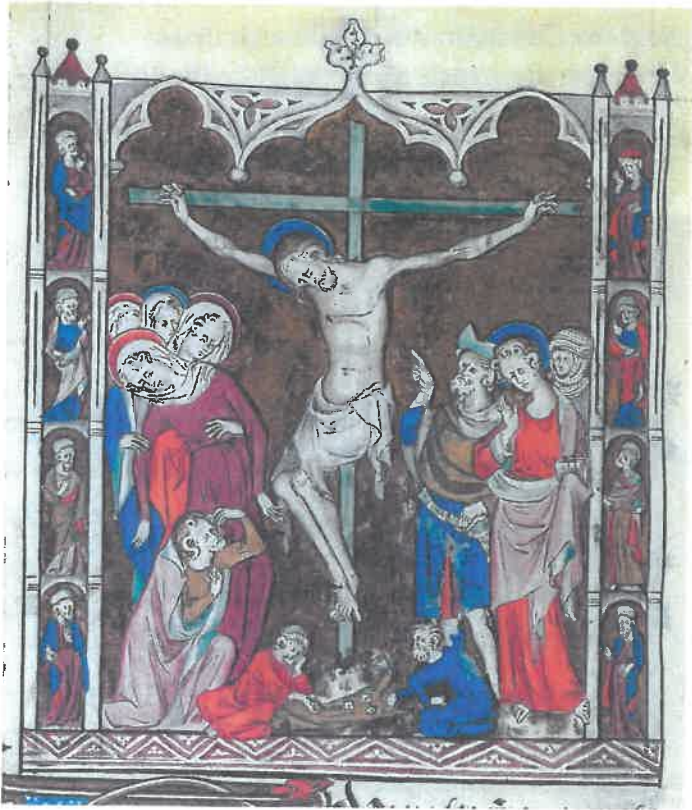
St. Catherine of Sienna: She was born during the outbreak of the plague in 1347 as the 25<sup>th</sup> child of her parents. She was a twin although her twin did not survive infancy. At the age of 16, her

sister died leaving her husband a widower. Her parents wanted her to marry her sister's husband but she refused. After fasting, cutting her hair and much prayer, her parents relented. Despite her religious nature, she never became a nun. Instead she lived the religious life at home. Dominican sisters taught Catherine how to read and from there wrote her mystical experiences known as the *Dialogues*. At the age of 21 she describes a mystical experience in which she was wedded to Christ. Throughout the rest of her life, she is noted for helping to heal the schism between the popes, her mystical experiences, and receiving the stigmata. She died at the age of 33.

### Art:

After centuries of the same basic themes and ideas in art, Christian art takes a massive move during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The combination of massive wars and the Black Death caused people to seek suffering, hope for redemption, and connection with the suffering Christ in their art work. This desire to connect with the suffering Jesus is coupled with the humanistic movement of the 13<sup>th</sup> century to create more lifelike depictions of Jesus. The most significant development in this century is the agony of Jesus. In most of the crucifixion paintings and also the crucifixes, Jesus is depicted in greater agony than we have seen for centuries. The agonizing Jesus helped people to connect their sufferings with the suffering of Jesus. Stations of the Cross developed during this century and become more widespread throughout the Christian world. Although these development's have been in process for two centuries, they reach a new height in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.







## A TREATISE OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

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*How a soul, elevated by desire of the honor of God, and of the salvation of her neighbors, exercising herself in humble prayer, after she had seen the union of the soul, through love, with God, asked of God four requests.*

The soul, who is lifted by a very great and yearning desire for the honor of God and the salvation of souls, begins by exercising herself, for a certain space of time, in the ordinary virtues, remaining in the cell of self-knowledge, in order to know better the goodness of God towards her. This she does because knowledge must precede love, and only when she has attained love, can she strive to follow and to clothe herself with the truth. But, in no way, does the creature receive such a taste of the truth, or so brilliant a light therefrom, as by means of humble and continuous prayer, founded on knowledge of herself and of God; because prayer, exercising her in the above way, unites with God the soul that follows the footprints of Christ Crucified, and thus, by desire and affection, and union of love, makes her another Himself. Christ would seem to have meant this, when He said: *To him who will love Me and will observe My commandment, will I manifest Myself; and he shall be one thing with Me and I with him.* In several places we find similar words, by which we can see that it is, indeed, through the effect of love, that the soul becomes another Himself. That this may be seen more clearly, I will mention what I remember having heard from a handmaid of God, namely, that, when she was lifted up in prayer, with great elevation of mind, God was not wont to conceal, from the eye of her intellect, the love which He had for His servants, but rather to manifest it; and, that among other things, He used to say: "Open the eye of your intellect, and gaze into Me, and you shall see the beauty of My rational creature. And look at those creatures who, among the beauties which I have given to the soul, creating her in My image and similitude, are clothed with the nuptial garment (that is, the garment of love), adorned with many virtues, by which they are united with Me through love. And yet I tell you, if you should ask Me, who these are, I should reply" (said the sweet and amorous Word of God) "they are another Myself, inasmuch as they have lost and denied their own will, and are clothed with Mine, are united to Mine, are conformed to Mine." It is therefore true, indeed, that the soul unites herself with God by the affection of love.

So, that soul, wishing to know and follow the truth more manfully, and lifting her desires first for herself -- for she considered that a soul could not be of use, whether in doctrine, example, or prayer, to her neighbor, if she did not first profit herself, that is, if she did not acquire virtue in herself -- addressed four requests to the Supreme and Eternal Father. The first was for herself; the second for the reformation of the Holy Church; the third a general prayer for the whole world, and in particular for the peace of Christians who rebel, with much lewdness and persecution, against the Holy Church; in the fourth and last, she besought the Divine Providence to provide for things in general, and in particular, for a certain case with which she was concerned.

*How the desire of this soul grew when God showed her the neediness of the world.*

This desire was great and continuous, but grew much more, when the First Truth showed her the neediness of the world, and in what a tempest of offense against God it lay. And she had understood this the better from a letter, which she had received from the spiritual Father of her soul, in which he explained to her the penalties and intolerable dolor caused by offenses against God, and the loss of souls, and the persecutions of Holy Church.

All this lighted the fire of her holy desire with grief for the offenses, and with the joy of the lively hope, with which she waited for God to provide against such great evils. And, since the soul seems, in such communion, sweetly to bind herself fast within herself and with God, and knows better His truth, inasmuch as the soul is then in God, and God in the soul, as the fish is in the sea, and the sea in the fish, she desired the arrival of the morning (for the morrow was a feast of Mary) in order to hear Mass. And, when the morning came, and the hour of the Mass, she sought with anxious desire her accustomed place; and, with a great knowledge of herself, being ashamed of her own imperfection, appearing to herself to be the cause of all the evil that was happening throughout the world, conceiving a hatred and displeasure against herself, and a feeling of holy justice, with which knowledge, hatred, and justice, she purified the stains which seemed to her to cover her guilty soul, she said: "O Eternal Father, I accuse myself before You, in order that You may punish me for my sins in this finite life, and, inasmuch as my sins are the cause of the sufferings which my neighbor must endure, I implore You, in Your kindness, to punish them in my person."

*How finite works are not sufficient for punishment or recompense without the perpetual affection of love.*

Then, the Eternal Truth seized and drew more strongly to Himself her desire, doing as He did in the Old Testament, for when the sacrifice was offered to God, a fire descended and drew to Him the sacrifice that was acceptable to Him; so did the sweet Truth to that soul, in sending down the fire of the clemency of the Holy Spirit, seizing the sacrifice of desire that she made of herself, saying: "Do you not know, dear daughter, that all the sufferings, which the soul endures, or can endure, in this life, are insufficient to punish one smallest fault, because the offense, being done to Me, who am the Infinite Good, calls for an infinite satisfaction? However, I wish that you should know, that not all the pains that are given to men in this life are given as punishments, but as corrections, in order to chastise a son when he offends; though it is true that both the guilt and the penalty can be expiated by the desire of the soul, that is, by true contrition, not through the finite pain endured, but through the infinite desire; because God, who is infinite, wishes for infinite love and infinite grief. Infinite grief I wish from My creature in two ways: in one way, through her sorrow for her own sins, which she has committed against Me her Creator; in the other way, through her sorrow for the sins which she sees her neighbors commit against Me. Of such as these, inasmuch as they have infinite desire, that is, are joined to Me by an affection of love, and therefore grieve when they offend Me, or

STABAT Mater dolorosa  
iuxta Crucem lacrimosa,  
dum pendebat Filius.

Cuius animam gementem,  
contristatam et dolentem  
pertransiuit gladius.

O quam tristis et afflicta  
fuit illa benedicta,  
mater Unigeniti!

Quae maerebat et dolebat,  
pia Mater, dum videbat  
nati poenas inclyti.

Quis est homo qui non fleret,  
matrem Christi si videret  
in tanto supplicio?

Quis non posset contristari  
Christi Matrem contemplari  
dolentem cum Filio?

Pro peccatis suae gentis  
vidit Iesum in tormentis,  
et flagellis subditum.

Vidit suum dulcem Natum  
moriendo desolatum,  
dum emisit spiritum.

Eia, Mater, fons amoris  
me sentire vim doloris  
fac, ut tecum lugeam.

Fac, ut ardeat cor meum  
in amando Christum Deum  
ut sibi complaceam.

Sancta Mater, istud agas,  
crucifixi fige plagas  
cordi meo valide.

Tui Nati vulnerati,  
tam dignati pro me pati,  
poenas mecum divide.

AT, the Cross her station keeping,  
stood the mournful Mother weeping,  
close to Jesus to the last.

Through her heart, His sorrow  
sharing,  
all His bitter anguish bearing,  
now at length the sword has passed.

O how sad and sore distressed  
was that Mother, highly blest,  
of the sole-begotten One.

Christ above in torment hangs,  
she beneath beholds the pangs  
of her dying glorious Son.

Is there one who would not weep,  
whelmed in miseries so deep,  
Christ's dear Mother to behold?

Can the human heart refrain  
from partaking in her pain,  
in that Mother's pain untold?

Bruised, derided, cursed, defiled,  
she beheld her tender Child  
All with bloody scourges rent:

For the sins of His own nation,  
saw Him hang in desolation,  
Till His spirit forth He sent.

O thou Mother! fount of love!  
Touch my spirit from above,  
make my heart with thine accord:

Make me feel as thou hast felt;  
make my soul to glow and melt  
with the love of Christ my Lord.

Holy Mother! pierce me through,  
in my heart each wound renew  
of my Savior crucified:

Let me share with thee His pain,  
who for all my sins was slain,  
who for me in torments died.

Fac me tecum pie flere,  
 crucifixo condolere,  
 donec ego vixero.

Let me mingle tears with thee,  
 mourning Him who mourned for  
 me,  
 all the days that I may live:

Iuxta Crucem tecum stare,  
 et me tibi sociare  
 in planctu desidero.

By the Cross with thee to stay,  
 there with thee to weep and pray,  
 is all I ask of thee to give.

Virgo virginum praeclara,  
 mihi iam non sis amara,  
 fac me tecum plangere.

Virgin of all virgins blest!,  
 Listen to my fond request:  
 let me share thy grief divine;

Fac, ut portem Christi mortem,  
 passionis fac consortem,  
 et plagas recolare.

Let me, to my latest breath,  
 in my body bear the death  
 of that dying Son of thine.

Fac me plagis vulnerari,  
 fac me Cruce inebriari,  
 et cruore Filii.

Wounded with His every wound,  
 steep my soul till it hath swooned,  
 in His very Blood away;

Flammis ne urar succensus,  
 per te, Virgo, sim defensus  
 in die iudicii.

Be to me, O Virgin, nigh,  
 lest in flames I burn and die,  
 in His awful Judgment Day.

Christe, cum sit hinc exire,  
 da per Matrem me venire  
 ad palmam victoriae.

Christ, when Thou shalt call me  
 hence,  
 by Thy Mother my defense,  
 by Thy Cross my victory;

Quando corpus morietur,  
 fac, ut animae donetur  
 paradisi gloria. Amen.

While my body here decays,  
 may my soul Thy goodness praise,  
 safe in paradise with Thee. Amen.

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From the Liturgia Horarum. Translation by Fr. Edward Caswall (1814-1878)