

The Cross

By Mark Warns

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Counted in the booty skinned from Carthage,
Plundered with the people Rome enslaved,
Stolen with their art and artists,
Victor legions shipped home the cross.
Brutal, slow, relentless cross.
Public torture unto death.
Carthage-made but Rome-perfected.
Death and degradation engineered.

Cross. Too cruel for citizens,
Saved for slaves and primitive provincials.

Spikes. Three spikes. Precise triangulation,
Stretching arms and bending knees, they pounded
Spikes through thickest bones of hands and feet for
Geometric agony that focused
On its lowest point, the spike transfixing
Feet to post. For if erect, their weight all
Borne on iron-scraped bones around that spike, they
Still could breathe. They still could live. But sinking,
Hearts and lungs would drown within their chests,
A rattling death to end their torture.

If unbeaten and unscourged,
Victims could survive for days,
With crows by daylight, rats by night,
Deaths sadistic sport for hecklers.

But Jesus Christ they beat and beat,
With hands and hate-clenched fists and sticks.
They stripped and scourged Him back and front,
A round-end scourge that left Him clothed in royal purple bruise
From neck to calves. They spat, and mocked, and crowned
The Jews' new King with thorns they hammered deep.

Christ, crucified, collapsed in hours. And, hanging from the spikes,
He struggled through His last few breaths as earthly death drew near.