



Our Lady of Sorrows

By Fr. Russell Becker, OFM

Dear Friend of the Missions,

For many people, September begins the time of serious work after the summer. Schools are in session, and we begin again to take work more seriously. There are the feasts that are important for the month: September 8 is the Nativity of Mary; September 14 is the Triumph of the Cross; September 15 is Our Lady of Sorrows; September 17 is the Stigmata of St. Francis, and September 29 is the Archangels: Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. The calendar also includes September 12 as the memorial of the Holy Name of Mary. This year is the fifth anniversary of the tragedy of 9/11. As we can all see, the world still needs a lot of prayer. Peace seems so far away, and still more people are dying from war, violence, lack of food and sickness. Check out the website and you will see the meditation and the appeal letter laid out with pictures. We hope to begin including some devotions and prayers on the website that you will be able to use to support your prayer life. Keep our missions in your prayers and be assured of ours. God bless you for your kindness to the missions.



The feast of Our Lady of Sorrows has had a long and varied history. In the present Church Calendar it is celebrated on the day after the feast of the Triumph of the Cross. One commentator says that the celebration of these two feasts brings together two strains of Christian spirituality: the Cross as a sign of glory, and the share all of the Lord's disciples will have in the sufferings of the Cross.

Devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows seems to have begun with the Servite Order. In 1239, five years after the order was established, the founders adopted devotion to the Sorrows of Mary as the principal devotion of that order. Reflection on the sorrowful events of Mary's life was also part of the preaching and teaching of the early Church. Sts. Ephrem, Ambrose, Augustine and Bernard all have beautiful meditations on the many sorrows of the Mother of God.

The devotion identifies these seven Sorrows of Mary:

- The Prophecy of Simeon [Luke 2, 25-35]**
- The Flight into Egypt [Matthew 2, 13-15]**
- The Losing of the Child Jesus in the Temple [Luke 2, 41-50]**
- Mary Meeting Jesus on his Way to Calvary [Luke 23, 27-29]**
- Mary Standing at the Foot of the Cross [John 19, 25-30]**
- Mary Receives the Body of Jesus Taken from the Cross [Psalm 130]**
- Mary Witnesses the Burial of Jesus [Luke 23, 50-56]**

Perhaps on the feast day you can use the Sorrows as part of your meditation along with the accompanying biblical passages.

The Mass.

The opening prayer for the Mass sets out the meaning of the feast:



Father, as your Son was raised on the cross, his mother Mary stood by him, sharing his sufferings. May your Church be united with Christ in his suffering and death and so come to share in his rising to new life, where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Mary stands at the foot of the Cross experiencing the pain of having to watch her only Son suffer. She is drawn into the sufferings of her Son, and the Church asks that it, too, may be associated with Christ in his sufferings, and thereby come to share in the glory of his resurrection.

The first reading (Hebrews 5, 7-9) speaks of the offering of the Lord, and his faithfulness to the Father in his sufferings. This made him a source of salvation to all who obey him. The Gospel has two alternatives: John 19, 25-27 (the account of Mary standing at the foot of the Cross and Jesus commending her to the beloved disciple and the disciple to Mary.) and Luke 2, 33-35 (the prophecy of Simeon that a sword would pierce Mary's heart.) Both speak of one of the sorrows of Mary. There is also included the sequence: Stabat Mater, a beautiful poetic hymn to Mary who stands at the foot of the Cross. The feast allows us to reflect on some things that touch our lives that we often try to ignore or forget.

The Cost of Discipleship. One of the things that we learn from the Sorrowful Mother is that the more successful we become at being disciples of Jesus, the closer we come to the Cross.

Discipleship is not just about discovering that Christ is risen and sharing the joy of the resurrection, it is also about sharing in the sufferings of the Cross.

This was a problem for many of the early followers of Jesus, especially when they began to experience some of the hardship of the Cross. Some left in disbelief. But those who really understood Jesus, knew that to follow Jesus was to follow him to Calvary, and then on to Easter.

Mary, as the first and best disciple, understood this. Her 'yes' was challenged over and over again, yet she always remained true to her 'yes.' God did not spare his only Son, which in turn did not spare the mother of that son.

In struggling to be disciples of the Lord, we have to ask for the strength and faith of Mary. We will all know some share in the sufferings of the Cross. Our often feeble 'yes' will be tested and tempted over and over as we live our lives. The Cross will touch our lives as individuals, as members of families, communities, the Church, and as members of the human family. Sadness, sorrow and pain may weigh heavy, but God will always be there. The bright promise of Easter will pierce the darkness of the Cross.



Mary is the first and best witness to this truth.

Lamentation. One of the things that we forget is that, while we are always supposed to proclaim that ‘Christ is risen,’ we are not supposed to think or pretend that everyday is Easter. Sure and certain faith in Easter gives us the strength to proclaim that ‘Christ is risen’ when our hearts are broken with sorrow and our eyes are filled with tears, and we feel numb from the sadness that has caused this. We see this best in the Bible in the psalms of lament and the Book of Lamentations. When people experienced tragedy, loss and even personal sin, they would cry in the presence of the Lord, speak of their pain and ask if God was listening. In those moments there came a word of reassurance. God is there, God is walking with us. God understands. The very sharing of the pain helped the people to recognize anew that God is taking care of things, and they were moved to thanks and praise.

This is not a bad thing for us to understand and to use. It is a therapeutic way of praying. By telling God the story of the pain, we begin to let go of it and discover, as we do, that God is there. Our prayer may start out: I hurt so much, is it true that ‘Christ risen?’ Then as the pain eases, still in shadows, if not darkness, we see a bit of light and can hear a whisper that says ‘Christ is risen.’ Then as the light comes rushing in, tears dry up, pain is eased, and our mourning is turned into dancing. We can give thanks and praise with full



voice for we know that ‘Christ is risen.’ Can you remember when this has happened? Do not be afraid to share your pain and the questions it raises with God.

Devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows is popular in difficult times.

It helps us to remember that God understands how pain and tragedy touch our lives. The temptation to think that God does not care, or is far beyond what we and the rest of the world feels, is easily erased in the image of Mary holding her dead son as he was taken down from the cross.



The image of Mary, the Sorrow Mother, is one that has helped people through their own sorrows for many ages.

After the attack of September 11, with the shock of such an attack and all the people who died, the first funerals, in the midst of intense mourning, were held on September 15, the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. And we were able to learn from her about trusting in God and being able to believe that God would bring us through even that Good Friday experience.

Questions for Reflection:

1. In difficult times do you wonder whether God understands or cares? In moments of doubt have you been able to renew your ‘yes’ to God’s call to discipleship?
2. Have you had the courage to share your pain, sadness and brokenness with God?
3. Do you trust that after every Good Friday experience, God will bring us to Easter?

The following is the sequence that is associated with the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. It is attributed to Giacomone da Todi (+1306) by some, and by others it is attributed to St. Bonaventure. The Latin text and the poetic texts are familiar to many of us because they are used with the Stations of the Cross: Stabat Mater (At the Cross her Station Keeping). There is also a prose translation from the Lectionary.

latin

Stabat Mater dolorosa
luxta crucem lacrimosa,
Dum pendebat Filius.

Cuius animam gementem,
Constritatum et dolentem,
Pertransivit gladius.

O quam tristis et afflicta
Fuit illa benedicta
Mater Unigeniti!

Quae morebit, et dolebat,
Pai Mater, dum videbat
Nati poenas incliti

Quis est homo qui non fleret,
Matrem Christi si videret
In tanto supplicio?

Quis non posset contristari,
Piam 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.

English

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.

Oh, how sad and sore distressed
was that Mother highly blessed
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 sweet Mother, font of love!
Touch my spirit from above,
Make my heart with thine accord.

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

Sancta Mater, istud agas,
Crucifixi fige plagas
Cordi meo valide.

Tui Nati vulnerati,
Tam dignati pro me pati,
Poenas mecum divide.

Fac me tecum pie flere,
Crucifixo condolere
Donec ego vixero.

luxta crucem tecum stare,
Ac me tibi sociare
In planctu desidero.

Virgo virginum praeclara,
Mihi iam non sis amara,
Fac me tecum plangere.

Fac ut portem Christi mortem,
Passionis fac consortem,
Et plagas recolorere.

Fac me plagis vulnerari,
Cruce hac inebriari,
Et cruore Filii.

Flammis ne urar succensus
Per te, Virgo, sim defensus
In die iudicii.

Christe, cum sit hinc exire,
Da per Matrem me venire
Ad palmam victoriae.

Quando corpus morietur,
Fac ut animae donetur
Paradisi gloria.
Amen.

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.

Let me mingle tears with thee,
mourning him who mourned for me,
All the days that I may live.

By the cross with you to stay;
There with thee to weep and pray;
Is all I ask of thee to give.

Virgins of all virgins blest!
Listen to my fond request:
let me share thy grief divine.

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

Wounded with his ev'ry wound,
Steep my soul till it hath swooned
In his very blood away.

Be to me, O Virgin, nigh,
Lest in flames I burn and die,
in that awful judgment day.

Christ, when thou shalt call me hence,
Be thy mother my defense,
Be thy Cross my victory;

While my body here decays,
May my soul that goodness praise,
Safe in Paradise with thee.
Amen

**Please remember the following
missionary friars on their birthday**

Fr. Patrick Tuttle, O.F.M. (Southern U.S.): September 4

Fr. Clement Comesky, O.F.M. (Bolivia): September 25

Fr. Ignatius McGeady, O.F.M. (Brazil): September 29



May God give
them many years of
health, peace
and energy!

**Also
remember our former
missionary friars who are ill:**

Fr. Champion Lally, O.F.M. (Japan)

Fr. Clement Healy, O.F.M. (Jamaica)

Fr. Thomas Fox, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Finian Riley, O.F.M. (Africa)

Br. Rosario Vieira, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Robert Nee, O.F.M. (Brazil)

May God grant them health and peace!

**Most High glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of my heart.
Give me right faith,
sure hope and perfect charity.
Fill me with
understanding and
knowledge
that I may fulfill
your command.**

—St. Francis' Prayer Before the Crucifix—

