

15. September 2023

## The sorrows of Mary

The memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows, which we celebrate today, dates back to the Feast of the "The Seven Sorrows of Mary", which was introduced by Pope Benedict XIII in 1721.

In Eastern Christianity, the Sorrowful Mother has been venerated since the first centuries. The great poet Ephrem the Syrian (+373) already sings of the Virgin under the Cross, and a large number of authors of Christian antiquity depict the Sorrows of Mary. These texts became part of the liturgy of the East. Thus, as early as the 6th century, the depiction of Mary under the Cross was common in the East.

In the West, on the other hand, devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows began to spread only in the 12th century. The Order of the Servants of Mary (Servites), founded in 1233, made the veneration of the "Mater Dolorosa" known to a large part of the Christian population. At this time, the famous hymn to the Sorrowful Mother, the "Stabat Mater", was also born. The veneration of Our Lady of Sorrows has been deeply rooted in people's hearts since the Middle Ages. Pilgrimage sites with the image of Jesus being placed in the lap of His Sorrowful Mother after His descent from the Cross have also been established.

The seven sorrows of Mary refer to the following moments of her life:

- The prophecy of Simeon: *"Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'Look, he is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is opposed- and a sword will pierce your soul too - so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare'"* (Lk 2:34-35)
- The flight into Egypt (Mt 2:13-15)
- The search for the Child Jesus (Lk 2:41-52)
- The meeting with Him on the way to Calvary (oral tradition)
- The Death of her Son (Jn 19:17-39)
- Receiving Him in her lap after the descent from the Cross (oral tradition)
- The burial of Jesus (Mt 27:57-61).

By referring to the seven sorrows of Mary, Sacred Scripture and the Church's reliable tradition show us the intimate union between the Mother and the Son. The sorrows of the Son are the sorrows of the Mother; the joys of the Son are also the joys of the Mother. Even beyond the natural capacity of a mother to suffer for her child, Mary's suffering is linked to the salvation of all mankind. Her Son, for whom she suffers, is also the "Son of man"; the One who offers salvation to mankind through His Passion, Death and Resurrection. Therefore, from the beginning, when the Angel brought her the announcement, Mary's suffering was a participation in the redemptive suffering of her Son.

If we unite ourselves to her by meditating on the various stations, in order to understand her pain more deeply, we too will be participating in this redemptive dimension of suffering. In this way, her pain becomes our pain.

The deepest dimension of pain is the rejected love of the Saviour. This will have torn her heart apart.

Each of Mary's sorrows was difficult to bear: the strong prophecy of the old man Simeon, announcing the suffering that awaited her; leaving home to flee to Egypt; the anguished search for the twelve-year-old Child; meeting her beloved Son on the Way of the Cross, seeing Him in such suffering; His Death on the Cross (what mother can endure such torment?); having her Son - whom she had given birth to - dead on her lap; witnessing His burial...

But what was her greatest sorrow, in all these sufferings for her Son?

I think I found the answer for me on Golgotha (Calvary), in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

I spent many hours in the early morning hours in prayer before the Sorrowful Mother. Her statue stands right next to the place of Our Lord's Cross, and her face is marked by pain.

I believe that her greatest suffering is the rejection of her Son's sacrifice of love. It is a wound that will continue to bleed as long as the world exists, and as long as those who are called to live as children of God reject the Redemption her Son offers them.

It is precisely here that we have a great opportunity to be a comfort to the Mother of the Lord. If the most important thing for her is that people recognise the love that the Heavenly Father offers us in His Son, we will be a great comfort to her if we do everything possible to make this love take shape in us and to proclaim it to others in word and deed.

In conclusion, I would like to dedicate to our beloved Virgin and Mother a song whose text was given to us in an inspiration. It could lend itself to meditation:

***Him, my Lord, they have rejected,  
who gave His love unto the Cross.***

*Him who is the head of creation,  
Him who in His love created all things,  
Him who dwells in me beyond comparing,  
Him they have rejected.*

*Him who is my life,  
crowned with thorns, mocked and tortured.  
In His eyes I saw the pain,  
the pain for the whole world.*

***Him, my Lord, they have rejected,  
who gave His love unto the Cross.***

*With my eyes I had to see  
the body I gave birth to,  
my love - shamefully betrayed,  
sold, crucified and cruelly put to death.*

*I heard His cry to the Father,  
the cry for life.  
No one knew Him as I did,  
the Son of God, who was also my Son.*

***Him, my Lord, they have rejected,***

*who gave His love unto the Cross.*

*His pain tormented me.  
I saw my love on the cross.  
My heart broke within me  
in my pain for Him.*