



Dolorosa

SEXAGESIMA WEEK

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The Sorrowful Passion of the Blessed Virgin Mary

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Several years ago, I accompanied one of the priests to our chapel in Rochester, New York. As some of you may know, on the weekends when the priest takes the four-hour drive to our chapels in Rochester or Williamsport, Pennsylvania, a seminarian usually drives him. So, on this particular occasion, I was chosen to drive. It was in the beginning of November during the octave of All Souls' Day. To gain the plenary indulgence for a poor soul, that is, the indulgence which the Church grants once a day to anyone who visits a cemetery and prays for the poor souls during the octave, we stopped at a cemetery near the chapel in Rochester. After walking around the cemetery for a few minutes, I noticed a headstone that stood out more than the others. I approached it to get a closer look at it, and I saw inscribed in large letters these words: *Our Only & Beloved Son, Michael*. Beneath his name was written this grief-filled little poem: *You were not just our son, You were our heart. And the day you died, Our world fell apart.*

It is commonly held that the greatest sorrow parents can experience, especially a mother, is not the death of their spouse or the death of their own parents; it is the death of their child. What makes it even more

painful is when that mother can do nothing to alleviate her child's suffering, but rather must watch him endure his pain alone. Such grief is unfathomable. What, then, must have been the sorrow of the Blessed Virgin Mary? What must she have suffered? She who would be filled with the most profound grief that any mother – that any human being – could possibly bear? For what mother ever loved her son as the Blessed Virgin Mary loved Jesus? He was her only Son, but at the same time, He was her God. "Her sorrow was so great," writes Saint Bernadine of Siena, "that if all the sorrows of the world were united, they would not equal the grief experienced by the Blessed Virgin Mary." Our Lady had to watch her only Son and her God be savagely tortured and then

be unjustly put to death. She watched the brutal soldiers scourge Him until His shredded flesh hung from His bones. She followed Him as He painfully carried His heavy cross up Mount Calvary while wearing a crown of thorns which pierced His sacred head. She then witnessed the cruel executioners drive the blunt nails into her Son's hands and feet before raising Him up on the cross to die. There, He hung for three long hours.

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There, He hung racked in pain, gasping for breath. And as He hung upon the cross in unspeakable anguish, the Blessed Mother stood by her divine Son. She would not leave Him. Then, after watching Him bow His sacred head and exhale His last breath, the Blessed Mother held the bruised and bloodied body of her dead Son in her arms. As she looked into His most adorable face, covered now with wounds and blood, what tears must have fallen from her eyes. Even though Our Lady knew He would rise from the dead in three days, even though she willed what was happening because her will was so united with God's, still, on the day her Divine Son died, it was as though her world had fallen apart.

What greater sorrow can there be than a mother holding the lifeless body of her only son? And how much greater the sorrow is when that son is God? How her Immaculate Heart ached at that moment! How her Heart aches today when she sees her Son tortured and crucified again, as it were, by mortal sin and by the innumerable, despicable sins of the world? Words cannot describe the sorrow she felt then and the sorrow she feels now. In fact, in his work *The Glories of Mary* (p. 408), Saint Alphonsus writes that "the grief of Mary was so great that were it divided among all men, it would suffice to cause their immediate death." Seeing any mother in such a state of sorrow should move one to compassion, but knowing that this is the Mother of God, how much more should one be moved to comfort her? Yet, how few there are who strive to console this most sorrowful of mothers in her grief. How few there are who try to do something to comfort her. Thus, the words of Psalm 68, which are applied to Our Lord, may also fittingly be applied to the Blessed Virgin Mary: "I looked for one who would grieve together with me, but there was none; and for one who would comfort me, but I found none" (68:21).

In the fourteenth century, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to Saint Bridget, and she poured out her heart to her. Our Lady lamented to her that very few consoled her by meditating on her sorrows and that the greater part of the world lived in forgetfulness of them. "I look around at all who are on earth," Our Lady said, "to see if by chance there are any who feel compassion for me and meditate



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upon my sorrows; and I find that there are very few." Continuing, the Blessed Virgin implored Saint Bridget: "Therefore, though I am forgotten by many, at least you, my daughter, do not forget me; consider my anguish, and imitate, as far as you can, my grief." To this end and to inspire the Catholic faithful with a filial love and compassion for the Sorrowful Mother, Pope Benedict XIII, in 1724, promulgated and encouraged the practice of the devotion to Our Lady's sorrows.

This, however, was not when the devotion began. Devotion to the Mother of Sorrows dates back to the beginning of the Church. In fact, the first example we have is Saint John the Apostle, standing at the foot of the cross with the Sorrowful Mother. But, it was not until the thirteenth century that the devotion of meditating on the sorrows of Our Lady began to flourish. Since that time, countless saints, popes, and theologians have praised the devotion to Our Lady's Sorrows and have recommended it as a most sublime practice, as has Our Divine Savior Himself. Saint Alphonsus Liguori relates in *The Glories of Mary* (p. 417) that Our Lord appeared to Blessed Veronica of Binasco and revealed to her that He is more pleased in seeing His Mother compassionated than Himself. "My daughter," He said to Blessed Veronica, "tears shed for My Passion are dear to Me; but as I loved My Mother Mary with an immense love, the meditation on the torments which she endured at My death is even more agreeable to Me." So agreeable is this devotion to the Son of God that it was revealed to Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, according to Saint Alphonsus, that at the request of Our Lady, Our Divine Savior promised four special graces to those devoted to her Sorrows:

- 1) That those who invoke the heavenly Mother in the name of her Sorrows will obtain true sorrow and repentance for their sins before death;
- 2) That He will protect them in their tribulations, and especially at the hour of death;
- 3) That He will impress upon their minds the remembrance of His Passion and will reward them for it in heaven; and,
- 4) That He will place such devout servants in the hands of Mary, that she may do with them as she wishes and obtain for them all the graces she desires.

In addition to these four graces, there are also seven promises attached to the daily practice of praying seven Hail Marys while meditating on Our Lady's sorrows. The Blessed Virgin revealed these seven promises to Saint Bridget of Sweden:

- 1) I will grant peace to their families.
- 2) They will be enlightened about the divine mysteries.
- 3) I will console them in their pains, and I will accompany them in their work.
- 4) I will give them as much as they ask for as long as it does not oppose the adorable will of my divine Son or the sanctification of their souls.
- 5) I will defend them in their spiritual battles with the infernal enemy, and I will protect them at every instant of their lives.
- 6) I will visibly help them at the moment of their death. They will see the face of their Mother.
- 7) I have obtained [this grace] from my divine Son, that those who propagate this devotion to my tears and dolours will be taken directly from this earthly life to eternal happiness since all their sins will be forgiven. My Son and I will be their eternal consolation and joy.

As we stand at the threshold of the holy season of Lent, preparing to meditate upon and contemplate the Passion and Death of Our Divine Savior, let us not be unmindful of Mary's grief. As she said to Saint Bridget, so she says to us: "My children, though I am forgotten by many, you at least do not forget me." Let not these words of a grieving Mother fall on deaf ears; rather, resolve to console this most sorrowful of mothers. Do this by adopting a very simple and devout practice, which does not even take much time. In fact, it is the practice Our Lady herself revealed to Saint Bridget, and which she enriched with very special promises. Comfort and console the Blessed Virgin Mary each day by reciting seven Hail Marys in honor of the Seven Sorrows, while meditating on one of her sorrows during each Hail Mary. It is a very simple devotion, but a devotion very dear to the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary.

"My children, though I am forgotten by many, you at least do not forget me."

To assist you with this and to aid you in compassionating Our Lady, over the course of the next seven weeks, we shall consider each of the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady: 1) The Prophecy of Simeon; 2) The Flight into Egypt; 3) The Loss of the Child Jesus in the Temple;

4) The Meeting of Jesus and Mary on the Way of the Cross; 5) The Crucifixion and Death of Christ; 6) The Removal of the Body of Jesus from the Cross and the Placing of It in the Arms of His Mother; and, 7) The Burial of Jesus in the Holy Sepulcher. May the contemplation of these events in the life of Our Lady inspire us never to let a day go by without thinking of her, and may it move us, in all the events of life, both joyful and sorrowful, to keep our hearts ever united with Our Blessed Mother's, as we pray in the beautiful, yet heartrending hymn the Stabat Mater:

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 our 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.
Let me mingle tears with thee,
Mourning Him who mourn'd for me,
All the days that I may live.
By the cross with thee to stay,
There with thee to weep and pray,
Is all I ask of thee to give.

