

Reflecting on Mary's Sorrows, Praying for Peace

By Mark Franceschini, OSM

September 15—Mother of Sorrows Feastday

Servites, associates, and friends gather at sites representing militarism—the cause of numerous sorrows in the world. (*Alternate locations include those representing disarmament.*)

In Mary's Sorrows, we see a reflection of the bitter anguish of Christ suffering in people around the world. In solidarity, read the reflection that accompanies each sorrow of the Servite rosary.

THE FIRST SORROW *The Prophecy of Simeon*

God is Love. Love gives life. Life is sacred. God's revelation brings meaning to our lives. Mary's "Yes" fulfills the essence of this truth: mystery and humanity covenanted forever.

Her joy and peace are rudely shattered by Simeon. A prophecy of rejection, violence and death: her own heart pierced by a sword of sorrow.

The human capacity for life-giving is challenged, threatened by its opposite capacity for evil and its chaotic consequences. Can we be faithful to our "yes" or will our "no" bring harm, pain to others and beyond others, to the wonders of God's creation?

THE SECOND SORROW *The Flight into Egypt*

Power, control and greed breed justification to sustain themselves. So subtle the loss of authority, leadership and self-love to these intolerant expressions of violence. Mary and Joseph must flee to save their Child, living as refugees in a foreign land, awaiting the day when the threat is no more.

In smaller, specific and personal fashions, we, too, need to soul-search our choices in life, especially in our relationships. These go much further than God, than the "me and mine" of marriage, family, and friends. They spill over into the treasure of God's blessing us with the wondrous gifts of nature and the universe. They need our care.

THE THIRD SORROW *The Loss of Jesus in the Temple*

The fears of parenting extend beyond protecting a child from all forms of harm. True parenting demands challenging the child to be responsible and caring in the face of natural selfishness and false expectations. Mary and Joseph experience the anxiety of a misplaced Jesus. They cannot rest until He is found and safe.

Our care for each other, and all others, makes us responsible, mature women and men, people of faith, hope and love. In this are the roots of discipleship, the response to Jesus' call to "follow Him." How far, and deep, does this call go? Do we draw limits: this far and no more. That is a choice. We need reminding: it's our choice, not God's.

THE FOURTH SORROW *Mary Meets Jesus on the Way to Calvary*

Mary's life is too real to avoid heartache, pain, sadness, aloneness, and the insecurity of poverty and the powerlessness of women in a man's world. She's been a single, pregnant teenager, a refugee, a widow and, now, she bears the label of mother of a condemned enemy of the state and people.

We live in a time and place where it is easy to avoid accountability. In general, people in the United States embrace the idea of being victims. It's become a refined act to find scapegoats responsible for every ill, political, economic, social, religious, ecological, and environmental. What makes it easy is the justification: I'm not the cause and I can't change it.

Carrying the cross, Jesus encounters His Mother and her heart breaks. He also encounters us. His gaze says: I didn't ask you to change the world or anyone else, just yourself.

THE FIFTH SORROW *Jesus Dies on the Cross*

Simeon's prophecy is fully realized as Mary stands below her Son's brutalized body as life ebbs away in pain beyond telling. Absolute, unconditional, personified Love will not cease being itself. It is generosity beyond all understanding. It invites Mary to do likewise: will you give Me up and take up what I have taken up, the whole of the human family? "Mary, behold your son. John, behold your Mother."

This parting gift touches us to the core of our being. How can we live our thanks, not merely express it? We know the answer: love one another as I love you. Uphold the sacredness of life and ever be life-giving. Respect life in every form and sustain it as responsibly as we are able.

THE SIXTH SORROW

Mary Receives the Body of Jesus

The depths of sorrow, the emptiness of separation, the abandonment of meaning, all experienced fully as Mary receives her blood soaked, battered Son in her lap. The arms which held Him with serene joy feel the dead weight of violence's fury.

Our imagining her pain gives way to understanding it because of our own experiences of separation, emptiness, death. It seems like returning to life is beyond us. Only the healing process affords us hope.

Part of our faith life calls us to be healers of wounds, builders of peace. It is this capacity which provides hope in a world of violent hatreds and unchecked powers. Here, too, it extends to the abuses of nature and the resources that contribute to our well-being. We need to be stewards of these riches, not abusers and wasters of what is meant for all.



THE SEVENTH SORROW

Jesus in Laid in the Tomb

No life avoids the inevitable results of love, care, generosity, compassion, and forgiveness. Death is part of life, bearable only because of the motherlode of treasured memories a life produces through love.

Mary's treasure is taken from her, yet lives ever and fully in her heart, mind and soul. This sadness will turn to joy, peace and the energy of hope which looks forward to the day of reunion.

We all embrace this hope. It is our faith and inspires us to continue loving. It only has limits when we set them. Mary understood Jesus the way we hunger to do likewise. What is Jesus saying to me today?

Each answer will be unique, private, personal. If we respond with sincerity of heart, and the justice Jesus calls us to, when He invites us to participate in the building of the kingdom, that call will embrace the universe and all life within it.

The story of love, the creation of life, will find us participating by our respect and responsible efforts to uphold and nurture life daily and everywhere.

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Further Information

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