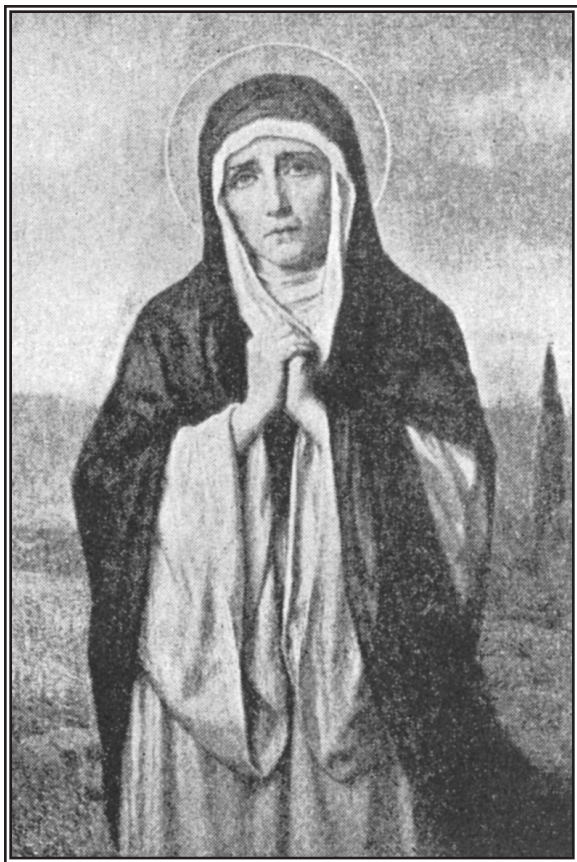


DEVOTION
TO THE
SORROWFUL
MOTHER

*“At the cross her station keeping,
Stood the mournful Mother weeping,
Close to Jesus to the last.”*

—From the *Stabat Mater*



The Mother of Sorrows

*“Holy Mother, pierce me through,
In my heart each wound renew,
Of my Saviour Crucified.”*

DEVOTION TO THE SORROWFUL MOTHER

*Including Prayers and Promises of
The Seven Sorrows of Mary*

*“And thy own soul a sword shall pierce,
that, out of many hearts, thoughts may be
revealed.”*

—Luke 2:35

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“Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalen. When Jesus therefore had seen his mother and the disciple standing whom he loved, he saith to his mother: Woman, behold thy son. After that, he saith to the disciple: Behold thy mother. And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own.”

— *John* 19:25-27

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DEVOTION
TO THE
SORROWFUL
MOTHER

*“O thou Mother, Fount of love!
Touch my spirit from above,
Make my heart with thine accord.”
—From the Stabat Mater*

Chapter 1

Devotion to the Mother of Sorrows

Sanctioned by the Church

DEVOTION to the sorrows of Mary has always been a favorite devotion among Catholics. It has been sanctioned by the Church and introduced into the Missal and Breviary. In order to keep before our minds the inexpressible sufferings endured for us by the Mother of God while she lived here on earth with her Divine Son, the Church observes two feasts in honor of the Seven Dolors (Sorrows) of Mary: one on the Friday before Good Friday and the other on September 15. She enriched with numerous indulgences the Rosary of the Seven Dolors, as well as a number of other devotions to the Mother of Sorrows. How touching is the beautiful hymn, *Stabat Mater Dolorosa* (see page 35), which the

Church intertwines with the public recitation of the Way of the Cross.

The Seven Sorrows

The Church spares no pains to induce her children to venerate the sufferings of their Heavenly Mother. **Seven of her sorrows have been chosen for our special veneration.** These are the ones selected for the mysteries of the Rosary of the Seven Dolors. (This is explained in detail on page 67.) They are:

1. The prophecy of Simeon.
2. The flight into Egypt.
3. The loss of the Child Jesus in the Temple.
4. Mary meets Jesus on the way to Calvary.
5. Jesus dies on the Cross.
6. Mary receives the dead body of Jesus in her arms.
7. Jesus is placed in the tomb.

Because of these Seven Sorrows which pierced her maternal heart, the Mother of God is often represented either as **standing beneath the Cross**, or as holding the lifeless body of Jesus on her lap, **her heart**

transfixed by seven swords, as foretold in the prophecy of holy Simeon at the Presentation: "And thy own soul a sword shall pierce." (*Luke 2:35*).

Holy Church recalls to our mind only **seven** of Our Lady's sorrows, but who could form an estimate of their real number! **The sufferings of the Mother of God cannot be comprehended**; they are inconceivable. But although her whole life was, like that of her Divine Son, a continuous series of sufferings and tribulations, the greatest woes and trials came to her during the week of the bitter Passion and Death of Jesus, when the storm of hatred and fury burst forth with all violence against Him.

During Our Saviour's Passion, every glance at her suffering Son forced the sword deeper into Mary's soul. Every sound of His voice brought special bitterness to her heart. Every increase of her love for Him—and it increased with every moment of His Passion—augmented her sorrows. The dearer and more precious Our Lord became to her, the more keenly she felt the heart-rending woe of His cruel and ignominious Passion! In her spirit as well as in her senses, she felt every blow that was

inflicted upon her Divine Son, every insult that was offered to His sacred Person. Yet no complaint or cry escaped her blanched lips. With heroic fortitude she suppressed her violent grief and, wholly conformed to the Divine Will, generously offered the sacrifice of her Son for the sins of the world.

Remember the Sorrows of Thy Mother!

When the aged Tobias of the Old Testament felt his end drawing near, he called his son and gave him wise counsels. Regarding his mother, he admonished him in this touching manner: "Honour thy mother all the days of her life: for thou must be mindful what and how great perils she suffered for thee." (*Tob. 4:3-4*). Truly, this is a beautiful lesson for us all regarding our earthly mother, but it may be applied still more appropriately to Mary, our Heavenly Mother, the Mother of our soul. From the Cross our Saviour gave her to each one of us for our Mother when He said to the Beloved Disciple: "Behold thy Mother." (*John 19:27*).

To us Our Lord also says: "Honor thy Mother all the days of thy life and be mindful of how much she suffered for thee." It

is on account of the exceedingly **great sorrows and sufferings which Mary endured for our salvation** that she deserves our compassion and highest esteem. If our own mother suffers long and intensely, we show our love and esteem by sympathizing with her. In return our mother loves us all the more tenderly. It is the same with Mary, our Heavenly Mother. She is greatly pleased if her children sympathize with her by thinking frequently of her sorrows.

The Mother of God once said to St. Bridget, "I gaze upon the children of men to see whether anyone feels compassion for me, and alas, I see but few! If many forget me, at least you, my daughter, do not forget me. Consider how much I have suffered."

Holy Church applies these words of Jeremiah to the Sorrowful Mother: "O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow." (*Lamentations* 1:12). "To what shall I compare thee? or to what shall I liken thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? . . . for great as the sea is thy destruction: who shall heal thee?" (*Lam.* 2:13). The love of Mary is referred to as a burning love which many waters cannot quench. (*Cant.* 8:7).

The Queen of Martyrs

The Church calls Mary the **Queen of Martyrs** because her martyrdom surpassed that of all others. Although her body was not bruised by torturers, her heart was pierced by the sword of compassion for her Divine Son—a sorrow sufficiently great to inflict a thousandfold death. St. Bernardine of Siena says the sorrow of Mary was so great that if it had been equally divided among all men, they would have died immediately. As great as was her love for Jesus—and it was unspeakably great—so great also was the sorrow of Mary at His Passion. Hence we can say with truth that Mary suffered more than if she had been martyred a thousand times, for she loved Jesus more than her own life and would have sacrificed her life a thousand times with the greatest joy if, without offending God, she could have rescued her Son from sufferings and death.

An Angel revealed to St. Bridget that, if Our Lord had not miraculously sustained His Mother, she could not possibly have survived her martyrdom.

Richard of St. Victor says: “In martyrs, the intensity of their love mitigated their sufferings, but with Mary it was different;

the more she loved, the more she suffered, and the greater was her martyrdom." St. Anselm makes the same declaration: "Whatever tortures were inflicted on the bodies of the martyrs, they were but little compared with thy sufferings, O Mother!" St. Basil says: "As the sun surpasses all the stars in lustre, **so the sorrows of Mary surpass all the tortures of the martyrs.**"

The martyrdom of Mary was lifelong, for according to Simeon's prophecy, she was enlightened with regard to the intense sufferings of her Divine Son. Her entire being was steeped in bitterness. The swords which pierced her soul penetrated also every nerve and fiber of her tender, sinless body. To her was wanting that great support which the martyrs enjoyed in their sufferings. During their torments, they directed their inward gaze toward Jesus, the Crucified, by whose grace and love they were strengthened and consoled. The flames of the love of Jesus cooled the fires of torture, softened the strokes of the scourges, and blunted the sharpness of the sword.

But in her anguish, where could Mary turn her gaze as she stood beneath the Cross? Upon Jesus? Ah, it was precisely **the**

sight of her Divine Son that caused her the most intense suffering. She was His Mother, a Mother more loving than all other mothers, loving as never yet a mother loved, loving more than all mothers combined could love, even if their thousandfold affections were united into one inexpressible act of love. In her heart were united **natural** love, by which she loved Jesus as her Son, and **supernatural** love, by which she loved Him as her God.

Jesus was **her Son, and such a Son!**—and in so wonderful a manner her Son! He was her treasure, the life of her life, her All! What an agony, penetrating her inmost being, lay in this sight! He was also her **God!** But oh, the humiliation of His being spat upon, mocked, ridiculed, lashed to purple stripes, bleeding with dreadful wounds!

How these tortures, inflicted upon her Son and her God, grieved the Mother's heart! In vain do we attempt to analyze the **anguish that flooded Mary's soul** as she stood beneath the Cross. Jesus, the joy and consolation of martyrs, was the cause of His Mother's greatest sufferings. Twice He crucified her: once by His human nature and again by His Divine nature. He **willed** that His Mother should suffer, for as the Mother

of the Redeemer, she was to participate in His work of Redemption. No martyrdom has ever equaled hers! Yes, at the foot of the Cross, where the mercy of God celebrated its greatest triumph, Mary was made the **Queen of Martyrs**, and at the same time she became our Mother, the Comforter of the Afflicted, the Help of Christians and the Refuge of Sinners.

Her one consolation at the sufferings of her Son was the knowledge that through His death we would be redeemed. Mary offered her Son willingly for our salvation; yes, the sacrifice she made in union with Him was so great that St. Alphonsus says of it, "Two hung upon one Cross."

Mary's Suffering Proportioned to Her Sanctity

As Mother of God, Mary was exalted to an incomparable height of holiness. Who can comprehend the lofty height of her greatness or fathom the abyss of her sanctity? St. Thomas attempted, and concluded that omnipotence itself could not invent a "greater greatness." It was necessary that her sorrows should correspond to her holiness, for the sufferings and tribulations of

the Saints always keep pace with their sanctity. What then must Mary's sufferings have been in order to be proportionate to her greatness—the greatness of the Mother of God! Who can comprehend the immensity of her graces and merits, and consequently the enormous weight of sufferings required by such holiness, to complete her perfection, to crown her most worthily?

The sorrows of the Mother of God **surpassed the power of human endurance**. It is the unanimous opinion of spiritual writers that beneath the pressure of her inconceivable sufferings, the Blessed Virgin's life was miraculously preserved. From the moment of Simeon's prophecy, she foresaw her sorrows in vivid reality. Without the special aid of God's omnipotence, her soul would have been separated from her body.

True, Mary was marvelously tranquil, because she was wholly submissive to the Will of God, but this did not lessen her sorrows. Her nature, never disturbed by sin, possessed an extraordinary tenderness and was susceptible to suffering in an inexpressibly high degree. "Men will never comprehend the anguish of my sorrows!" she revealed to St. Bridget.

The picture of Mary bowed down with sorrow on Calvary teaches us that on earth pain is the twin sister of love.

Circumstances Which Increased Her Sufferings

We can gain some idea of the immensity of the dolors of our Blessed Mother by considering the conditions that imparted special bitterness to her sufferings. Placed in similar circumstances with the Blessed Virgin Mary, what mother would not have longed to die with her son? But **Mary could not die with Jesus**, although union with Him had become so much a part of her nature that it actually constituted her life. Jesus, her Son, was the **bliss of her heart, the sun of her existence**. How could Mary live without Jesus! Still, she must see Him die, without being able to die with Him! What inexpressible grief!

Another circumstance that increased the anguish of the Mother of God was the realization that **her sufferings increased those of her Divine Son**; that these were, in fact, some of the bitterest pangs He had to endure. It was His Will that His Blessed Mother should form a part of His suffer-

ings. When we consider the boundless love with which He loved His Mother, we will understand that to meet her on His way to Calvary, to behold her beneath the Cross, was truly one of His most acute tortures. Mary knew this. What pain for her maternal heart to know that **she must be one of the causes of His sufferings!**

Again, **Mary was an eye-witness** of the sufferings of her Divine Son. She saw Him bound to the pillar; she heard the lashing of the scourges; she saw His delicate virginal flesh writhe and quiver under the lacerating blows. She was present at the *Ecce Homo* scene, on the way to Calvary, and at the Crucifixion. And her anguish was further increased by the fact that she could offer no relief to her dear Son in His excruciating pains. As she stood beneath the Cross, she saw the Blood trickling from His thorn-crowned Head into His eyes, but could not reach His sacred Face to wipe the drops away! She saw His lips parched with thirst, pale and bloodless, but was unable to give Him a refreshing drink! His head had no pillow to rest upon, yet she was prevented from supporting it or letting it repose upon her bosom. Who can comprehend the anguish endured by her

motherly heart during those **three endless hours of dreadful helplessness!**

As the Blessed Virgin stood beneath the Cross, there was still another source of most bitter sorrow for her, namely, **her clear conception of the nature of sin.** We may not doubt that Our Lord imparted to His Mother a supernatural knowledge of sin—its wickedness, its hideousness, and the horror and hatred that God entertains for it. The hideousness of sin she beheld written on the Cross in the Precious Blood of Jesus. She saw **the sins of the whole world,** like a mountain, pressing upon the bowed shoulders of her bleeding, dying Son. She saw that He—truly God *and* man—was crushed by the numberless sins of man, covered with their guilt, crucified by their malice! What unspeakable suffering for the sinless, guiltless, Immaculate Heart of our sweet Mother!

Another source of Mary's unutterable grief was **man's ingratitude** for Our Lord's Passion, and the eternal perdition of so many souls for whom her Son's Precious Blood would be shed in vain. She, the Queen of the Apostles, the Mother of the Church, saw passing before her eyes a vision of the heedlessness of mankind for sins forgiven, the relapses into mortal sin,

the amazing, frightful multitude of venial sins, the cold indifference, the disgust for Divine things, the desecration of the holy Sacraments, the rejection and abuse of grace on the part of so many souls—all consequences of the basest ingratitude.

Now with the eyes of her soul **she saw the multitude of the damned**, for whom all the sufferings of her Son would be lost. At this sight, what indescribable pain must have pierced to its very depths the most loving heart of our dearest Mother!

Mary's Sorrows Merit Our Grateful Veneration

The sufferings of Mary at the death of her Divine Son rent her heart. Our Lord therefore said to St. Mechtilde: "Greet the heart of My Mother as the most patient* of hearts; for **it was pierced by thousands of swords**, both during My Passion and Death, and afterwards when she remembered these dreadful torments."

For fifteen years after the death of her

*The word "patient" in this sentence may be an English translation of a Latin word (from *patior, pati*) that could also be translated as "long-suffering" or even simply as "suffering." —*Publisher*, 2002.

beloved Son, until her own happy departure, the Passion of Our Lord was renewed over and over again in the heart of the Blessed Virgin. It was revealed to Mary of Agreda that after the Ascension of her Son, Mary suffered inexpressibly every Friday, as do certain privileged souls who are favored with the stigmata. All these sufferings Mary endured for love of us.

Special Lovers of Mary Sorrowful

Many Saints have cherished a special love for Mary as the Mother of Sorrows. St. Ignatius Loyola constantly wore an image of the Sorrowful Mother on his bosom and venerated her with tender devotion.

Blessed Henry Suso, who cherished a most tender compassion for the Dolorous Mother and meditated often on her sorrows, received wonderful revelations from her own lips. Mary said to him, among other things: "Consider that all the grief ever endured by a human heart would be as a drop of water to the vast ocean compared to the fathomless grief and anguish that my maternal heart endured at the foot of the Cross!"

St. Alphonsus Liguori made the sorrows of Mary the subject of his daily meditations

and his deepest compassion. When he conducted a mission, he usually placed a picture of the Sorrowful Mother beside the pulpit, so that the faithful, by gazing upon it, might devoutly reflect on Mary's sufferings and be encouraged to confide in her merciful intercession. During his sermons, he often invoked the Mother of Sorrows and exhorted sinners to turn to her to obtain the grace of sincere conversion. Among his writings are several treatises on the sorrows of Mary.

The saintly Pope Pius IX nourished a deep devotion to the bitter sufferings of our Saviour and those of His Sorrowful Mother. The frequent remembrance of Our Lord and His Mother in their sorrows and sufferings seemed to him an efficacious means of converting sinners, affording them a lasting incentive to contrition, penance and amendment. Therefore (in 1847) he approved a new "Hail Mary" composed in honor of the Dolorous Mother. The prayer is as follows:

The Sorrowful Hail Mary

HAIL Mary, full of sorrows, the Crucified is with thee; thou art pitiable amongst women, and pitiable

is the Fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of the Crucified, implore for us, the crucifiers of thy Son, tears of contrition, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

A Religious Order Dedicated to the Sorrowful Mother

From the fact that Mary wished to have a religious Order in the Church which would have the veneration of her sorrows as its special object, we may infer how much Mary herself desires us to venerate her dolors. Devotion to the sorrows of Mary has been practiced in the Church at all times. This is proved by numerous passages from the writings of the holy fathers, by prayers, pictorial representations and touching hymns. But God desired that devotion to the sorrows of the Mother of His Son should remain an abiding practice among all the faithful. To accomplish His design, He called into existence an Order whose special object should be to practice and foster devotion to the sorrows of Mary.

The Mother of Sorrows entrusted the establishment of this Order to seven pious noblemen of Florence, Italy. In 1223, on

Good Friday, as these men were meditating together on the Passion of Our Lord and the sufferings of His Blessed Mother, Mary appeared to them in heavenly beauty, accompanied by hosts of Angels. Some of the Angels carried the instruments of Our Lord's Passion; others carried black garments in their hands. One of the Angels held a book, the Rule of St. Augustine; another held in his right hand a scroll bearing the title of the new Order, "Servants of Mary," in letters of gold, and in his left hand, a palm. The Blessed Virgin invested her servants with the black garment—it was the Black Scapular.

While these saintly men were enraptured at what they beheld, they heard these words from the lips of the Blessed Virgin: "I have come, my elect servants, to comfort you in reply to your earnest petitions. Behold this garment; wear it in future. The black color should continually remind you of the sorrows which I experienced on this day at the death of my Son. The palm which you behold announces to you the glory that awaits you in Heaven if you serve me faithfully on earth."

The holy founders did as Mary bade them. Their spiritual sons have likewise

propagated with great zeal the devotion to the sorrows of Mary. They are known as the Servants of Mary, or the Servites. Even persons who are not members of the Order may participate in the merits and good works of its members by being invested with the Black Scapular of the Order. This Scapular is usually included in the so-called Fivefold Scapular. Many graces and benefits may be gained by devoutly wearing this Scapular, but those who wear it must also venerate the sorrows of Mary.

Note: For novena booklets giving the prayers for making the seven stations of Our Sorrowful Mother (the *Via Matris*), and for other Sorrowful Mother devotional items, one may contact the Servite Fathers at: National Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows, Basilica of Our Lady of Sorrows, 3121 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, IL 60612. —*Publisher*, 2002.