

The Seven Sorrows of Mary: Looking through eyes of faith, hope and love.

Friday: Opening Presentation

Mary plays a key role in God's plan for our salvation. Not only is she the mother of our Lord Jesus, she is obedient to God's will, before, during and after Jesus' life on earth. Her faithfulness to the Father and her Son is sung throughout history. Her steadfast faith, hope and love in and for God, throughout her life, truly serve to open the hearts of all believers. She is "full of grace", thus gives us a unique perspective on how we can use God-given graces in our own lives. Mary's unique relationship with God and Her Son Jesus places her in the midst of God's saving actions: as mother of God, witness, disciple, sign of hope in the kingdom of heaven, and above all, lover of God and God's children. Her life is a living sacrifice of praise and a life-giving hope; the twofold mystery of the presence of the Kingdom of God now and forever. Mary is only human, thus, shows us the beauty and depth of our own humanity. Her faithful "Yes" to the angel Gabriel is realized fully through her perfect response to the will of God.

The Seven Sorrows of Mary, as revealed in the chaplet, give us a template on which to reflect on some crucial episodes in her life with Jesus. We already know that the fulfillment of God's plan in Jesus (His life, death and resurrection) was His joy; so much did He love His Father and us. We will follow Mary's walk with her Son and reflect on the fulfillment of her own "Yes" to God. As God's handmaid, His will for her is both sacrifice and love. Her "Yes" then represents the beauty and depth of her faith, hope and love. Through Mary's unbreakable faith, we see, at once, as we saw with Jesus, faith in the midst of struggle, hope in the midst of suffering and death, and always, love.

In reflecting on Mary's mystery, we can also focus on these three key words: struggle, resurrection and hope (Pope Francis; in his reflection on her Assumption). In her *Magnificat* (Lk. 1:46-55), we also see these themes play out; i.e. the lowly is exalted and glorified (struggle, resurrection, and hope). Mary's life with Jesus enables us to see God's plan for her, her whole mystery, unfold before our eyes. With this blessing and grace, hence, moved in mind and heart, we can discover the deep mystery and majesty of her sorrows. Mary is full of grace; thus, her experiences are transformed by the light of grace.

We desire to know our life's mystery in this way as we too experience struggle, and hope in the many resurrections borne by our faith. If only our faith could give, us at once, the courage to stand firm and the love to stand tall come what may. Mary's faith won for us this revelation. Our goal, therefore, is to see, in our walk with Jesus, the fulfillment of God's plan in us, as faith in the midst of struggle, hope in the midst of sorrow and love beyond our desiring.

The First Sorrow: The Prophecy of Simeon (Luke 2:25-35)

Simeon awaits the consolation of Israel. It was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord. Simeon, led by the Spirit, came into the temple and he took the child Jesus in his arms and blessed God, saying, "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation for the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel...and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed."

Wonder and amazement:

Where is Mary in all this? Luke says. “The child’s father and mother were amazed at what was said about him” (v. 33). They marveled with wondering. Mary and Joseph, no doubt, knew that the child was the Son of God; but what this would mean for His life and theirs was still a mystery. We can only imagine what she thought about, “a sword piercing her.” She was not unaccustomed to violence. Having lived under Roman occupation all her life, and had seen the many corpses of executed Jews left on their crosses as a reminder of what happens to insurrectionists of the government and runaway slaves. Not to mention the stoning of sinners and “eye for an eye” justice of her own Jewish laws. Yet still, she is up to the task. Not just with blind obedience, but with faith in the one God she hopes to know, now more than ever, through her Son. Her heart is open so that His revelation may open her even more.

Consolation and contradiction: light for revelation

There is much to be celebrated here. The birth of Jesus brings hope to fulfillment, but not without suffering. There is much light for revelation and glory, but not before the thoughts of many hearts are revealed. A great reckoning will come forth and all that is false, all that is hidden in darkness, will be revealed by His light. (cf. 1 John 5-7) Will the light of Christ be enough to fill our hearts with truth? Will the truth lead to our dying to sin and our rising to new life? Will He be the contradiction that leads to our consolation, or the contradiction that leads to our self-deception? Will it bring peace enough for us to welcome death? Or will it just expose us for our lies, and harden our hearts? The humble will hear and be glad, but the mighty are cast down. A humble, contrite heart, He will not spurn. (cf. Lk. 1:46-55; Ps. 51)

Mary experiences consolation in spite of her bewilderment. She is singlehearted. In her steadfast faith there is no contradiction or duplicity of mind. She has nothing to hide from God. She is an open book ready for His hand; that He may write His will upon her heart. If God’s will includes suffering, then so be it. This does not mean that she is without fear, but trusting, it does not overcome her; she never despairs.

[The nature of this suffering:

Suffering in the form of wanting and craving things that do not satisfy is unnecessary suffering. God does not want us to suffer needlessly. Jesus often asks His disciples, why do you worry about what you do not have, or spend your money for what does not satisfy? Can anxious thoughts add one day to your life? Just have faith. (cf. Lk. 12:22-34; also Lk. 6:20-26 *the Beatitudes*). Our worries and fears can bring about great suffering. They often cloud our judgment, turning us inward and against each other; leading us to sin. If our choices lack prudence and right judgment, they will bring about unnecessary suffering. This suffering can also bring us back to our senses and to a change of heart. This, however, is not the suffering that relates to Mary. The suffering we are addressing here is the suffering that we do not cause ourselves.]

Love must suffer to shine:

God’s love comes to us as the Light of the World. His love is most wounded by those who hide from its revelation because of sin. Love hopes to draw all things into itself, for what is in the light is no longer darkness. (cf. Eph.5:6-14) We are children of light that walk in the light. God’s love is this light that must be put out when we hide in darkness, lest it exposes the lies that embrace our truth. As light gives of itself to overcome the darkness, love must suffer to reveal the hearts of men and women; for we do not love as

we ought. This unrequited love wounds the hearts of those who love Him—who suffer with Him for the sake of His body the Church.

Mary's heart must also bleed, as she lives to lead us to her Son; not for her own glory, but “rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it” (Lk. 11:28). She suffers for the sake of her children; for the sake of those who are called to be mother, sister and brother of our Lord. (cf. 8:21) The sorrow and pain caused by the rejection of perfect Love breaks our hearts. Those hard of heart are unmoved, but the lover of souls suffers for sinners. Mary will open her heart so that the hearts of many may be revealed. This choice to suffer with her Son, to endure insult and injury that pierces her heart for His sake, is the suffering that shines for the glory of God.

Silent reflection

Remember, suffering that is self-inflicted or caused by wanting and craving things unnecessary for the love of God and neighbor, is needless suffering; since they do not satisfy our deeper desire. As St. Augustine said, “Our souls are restless until they rest in you [God].”

Take an inward look then at the causes and then the sources of your own suffering: You may be in a toxic relationship, in debt, addicted to drugs, sex, power or just more. You may be unsatisfied with life, bored, detached from yourself, your feelings or truth. Thus, you live in your ego. [And since the ego is a derived sense of self (made up, not true) it needs to identify with material things. Therefore, it needs to be fed and defended constantly. This is a masquerade, a fraud, a lie and you know it; it is your secret.] This self-deception leads to guilt and shame. You feel incomplete, lacking integrity, broken. Therefore, you feel unworthy, not good enough. Maybe you have simply made a bad choice that has scarred you. Or you dug yourself into a hole that is very difficult to climb out of without help, but you are too prideful to ask for help. Maybe, you are a victim of a dysfunctional family or greater form of emotional or sexual abuse, and your wounds are still unhealed.

Sometimes, it is our suffering family, friends, or physical diseases or loss of job or a loved one that causes us suffering. This suffering is closer to that of Mary's. She suffers for her children and prays for their deliverance. She does not despair, but with faith, hope and love, puts her trust in God. When we suffer for the sake of another, we are suffering like Jesus and Mary; this suffering is redemptive. This suffering is our cross to bear. Still all suffering can lead to our salvation.

The Gospel:

With sin came a need for redemption, thus suffering cannot be avoided. Redemption requires atonement. Someone must pay the price for sinners. The Gospel message is this Good News: Jesus came to save us from our sins because He loves us. By His rising, He has destroyed death. He is our strength and our hope. He can heal our wounds and forgive our sins.

What is needed is faith. Fear is the enemy's device. It takes time and significant people to help us believe, but it is very possible to find peace within oneself and joy and love in the promises of Christ. One of the ways in which we remember Christ in the Holy Eucharist is when the gospel is proclaimed. We are reminded that the victory of the just, and that the suffering of the blessed is redemptive indeed. It is how we've been saved, how we are being saved (the weaving of our wedding garment here on earth) and thus, how we shall be saved, our heavenly hope.

What to do:

Pray daily. Meditate on these Divine or Theological Virtues (faith, hope and love) with a desiring, open heart. See yourself as one with the Eternal God who loves you and fills you with His grace.

Make a good confession. Forgive yourself for your bad choices. Let go of all grievances of your past.

Change! Fix what needs fixing. End self-inflicted suffering. Eradicate debt and clutter from your life. Get rid of all toxins from your body and life. Remove all toxic substances and people from your life. Let Christ be your light; a light for revelation.

Know yourself. Be honest. Listen carefully to your spirit and body. Make right choices. Seek counsel if needed. Live right. Think right. Free yourself from political or tribal reasoning; thus the contradictions and hypocrisies of your life. Be generous, kind and loving.

Live simply. Stay in the present. Stay in the spirit. Resist earthly pride and greed. Be grateful. Relinquish yourself from all external approval. Educate yourself. Read the Bible and good spiritual books. Go on retreats. Stay connected.

Give back; pass on what you have received from God. Giving keeps God's streams of living water flowing. Don't give and you will become stagnant and lifeless like the Dead Sea. Be a disciple of Christ.

Saturday morning: The Childhood of Jesus

The Second Sorrow: The flight into Egypt (Matthew 2: 13-14)

And after the wise men had departed, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, and said, "Rise, take the child and His mother, flee into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy Him."

Where is Mary in all this? She begins to feel real pain. Remember, she leaves Elizabeth with the young John the Baptist behind in danger. She leaves her entire family and security behind. She takes only her husband and Son. Although He is God's Son, she will have to protect Him and raise Him to know who His Father is in an alien land; a land from which her ancestors ran from slavery. I am sure that Mary also asked "Why God?" Every person does. Could Mary have remembered the words of Gabriel? "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you" (Lk. 1:35b); this time, to be their shelter, their courage and guide.

Most times we don't know "why?" until we have made it through to the other side of our struggles. Only then, do we understand how we were being prepared for even greater things, and even greater suffering. Sometimes we think we are all alone, but God is walking with us; at times, carrying us. The 23rd Psalm comes to mind. We do not always know the way, and we walk in the valley of the shadow of death. But He will send His angels to watch over us, and His light will guide our way.

This light can be a refining fire for our purification and strengthening. "The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment [hell] shall touch them...As gold in the furnace, he proved them, and as sacrificial offerings he took them to himself" (Wis. 3:1-6). We, therefore, must always trust in God's providential care. For, we seek not only to find our way, but our truth. He is the truth, the life and the way. Thus, through Him, with Him and in Him, we find both our way and our truth.

Struggle:

Struggle is necessary for life. No one came into the world without struggle. In every birthing process there is struggle, as though a lesson for our growth and survival begins, at once, to equip us for life's transformations and glory. Not all our lessons need to be a struggle, but we always seem to learn more from our painful experiences than our less significant ones. God is constantly preparing us through the challenges that we face. Life's obstacles can all be blessings, not curses, on our way to glory. Therefore, we should not give up too soon, for our faith tells us to hold on until we receive our blessing. Hold on until our will is broken, our hearts strengthened and our hope is in the Lord. Our greatest development comes not from the times of plenty, but from our hard times—from endurance in times of struggle. (cf. 1 Thess. 1:4-9; 2 Thess. 3:5) St. Paul says it best, "We even boast in our afflictions knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom. 5:3b-5). St. Paul also boasts in his weakness, that the cross of Christ might be glorified. Thus, he knows that he too must carry the dying and rising of Christ in his body. (cf. Col. 1:24) This blessed assurance he offers to those who suffer as the source of encouragement and hope. All suffering done in faith is redemptive for those who trust in hope of the glory of God. The devil seeks to destroy the Christ child, who is our hope, and those who belong to Him, yet even "now have salvation and power come, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His anointed" (Cf. Rev. 12).

Evil:

Many a prophet called out to God, saying, why do you make me look on destruction? Why do I go on oppressed by the foe? God's people are not sheltered from the sufferings that come from the actions of evil seeds sown by the devil among the good seed. (Matt. 13:38b-39b) The wheat and the weed share the same field until the harvest. (Matt. 13:24-30) Therefore, it is important that we know evil when we see it, and distinguish it from good. The parable serves us well in this: In the end, the wheat will bend humbly, filled with plenty of good seed, while the weeds stand tall and proud, though empty inside. Again, an evil tree does not bear good fruit nor does a good tree bear evil fruit. There is no confusing the truth. However, the good can be corrupted by evil; this is the plan of the devil. We must, therefore, be on guard against all evil.

Your light in darkness fills:

The destruction of the good seed is the ongoing plan of the evil one. From light shines love and mercy, darkness is its absence; e.g.: hate, destruction, corruption and death. We must remember that the Light came into the world and the darkness shall not overcome it. Our light must shine! We must live and walk in the light (the light of Christ, the light of truth and love) to expose that which is hidden in darkness, and ransom those in fear. (cf. Lk 11:33-36; Eph. 6:10-20)

Mary is entrusted by God with the Light of the World. She is God-bearer and Light-bearer. She holds the Paschal Light for us all. What does it feel like to let your light shine (to keep your baptismal candle burning brightly) while protecting it from darkness? We too are the light of the world. We are God's children now. We are children of the light. When darkness surrounds you, what do you do? We too must take courage, and take care to protect what is most dear to us, Jesus, the Light of the World. It is He who we must protect, He alone is holy. He alone can make our darkness bright.

God's plan:

God has a plan for us. We don't always see it clearly. At times, it may feel like God is being careless with us; or that we are being unjustly punished. (cf. Job) But if we reflect, we will realize that God is always present; that we have experienced grace upon grace, in spite of peril. Can a mother forget her children? Even so, God will never forget you. Our redemption will come; we only need to be faithful. When tested, we do not break with faith. When thirsty, we still drink though the well is dry.

The Third Sorrow: The Lost Son (Luke 2:43-45)

As Mary and Joseph were returning from Jerusalem from the Feast of Passover, the boy Jesus, who was twelve years old, remained in Jerusalem in the temple unbeknownst to them. They journeyed on for one day, looking among their relatives and friends, and when they did not find Him returned to Jerusalem. After three days of searching with great anxiety, they found him in the temple.

Mary and Joseph are like us. We too can get a little complacent with God. So much for doing God's will, if we can't find Jesus. This is cause for alarm. However, they know what they must do; they must find Him before they can go forward. They must find Him if they are to fulfill God's plan for them. They must go back, because all the progress they might make without Him is not for the glory of God.

We know that Mary has been blessed by God and could accomplish great things simply by means of her virtue; but she is the handmaid of the Lord. Her purpose is to serve God; thus her life is united with God's Son. She does not ever imagine usurping God's authority or privilege in any way. She seeks only to do His will. Therefore, this separation from her Son is truly painful. She longs for reunion with Him.

Our vocation in life should always be in service to God, whether laity or clergy. And although we can do some good things without God, we cannot truly glorify God without Christ. Without Jesus all is vanity and a chasing after the wind. With Jesus, the Spirit becomes the wind beneath our feet, the breath in our lungs and the fire in our hearts. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, we follow Him.

Fear—worry, tension, stress and anxiety:

We too go through periods in our lives searching for God with great anxiety. The assurances of our Lord can seem to ebb and flow, crest and fall, like waves in our spiritual ocean. Mountaintop transfigurations can give way to desolate valleys, and peaceful streams turn into arid wastelands of dry bones. Like Mary and Joseph, we eventually realize that God has not moved; He is right where we left Him. These are still times of great anxiety. Fear is never the answer. We must go back; we must search until we find Him.

Where is God?

God has not moved. God is the only constant in our lives. Everything changes but God. We, however, are forever learning and changing our minds and hearts, hopefully becoming wiser. We are growing older and weaker, richer or poorer. We are being moved by the constant changes of our world around us, and all this brings us a great deal of worry and anxiety. Sometimes our family and friends can help us when we feel like God is lost; but more often, we have to go back to where we last had Him in our sight. If we retraced our steps, we would see that it was not God who moved, we did. Sometimes, we must go back to our original innocence, when we were children with open minds, free and unencumbered by our fears and

hardness of heart. We too must return to the holy place where God can be found uncorrupted by self-interest, politics and even family ties; where all that matters is His truth and wisdom.

The child Jesus is not lost. He has found His place in His Father's house and only desires to be filled with His wisdom and presence. The Child has found Himself, i.e., His purpose, His vocation—God's plan for Him. He must still, however, be guided by His parents. His time has not yet come. This was Mary's and Joseph's time. Jesus went home with His parents and was obedient to them.

God is in His holy Temple:

“Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race” (Rev. 21:3). St. Paul makes this point often. We are the body of Christ, we are His Church, we are as living stones built on the foundation of Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, God is never far; He is very near. When we feel lost, we only need to pray—to realize the presence of God in us and to listen to His words of wisdom and love. Prayer is where faith is found. St. Teresa of Calcutta said, “Prayer is where God fills our hearts with love.” Prayer fuels our ministry, i.e., our mission to bring to fruition the saving plan of God. Prayer helps us to love more.

Silent reflection

Our faith goes through stages of growth and development. In the childhood of our faith, we too find ourselves in danger of being lost. Our faith is often challenged by many things and people who can do it harm. Many temptations lie in wait like traps to ensnare us. Many times we are fortunate, or were it by God's grace that we escaped unharmed? When faith is young, we don't always see the dangers that we face. We don't always stay where we are safe. Most of all, we don't realize that God has a plan for us.

When faith was young:

Do you remember when your faith was young and the many times that you endured in spite of the foe? Who helped you to manage? Did you grow up in a believing family? Did they take you to church? Who were there to watch over you? Who taught you to believe in Christ? Who taught you right from wrong, good from evil? Was there a grandparent or godparent who loved you and inspired faith in you? Who taught you your catechism, your prayers? Do you remember a teacher, priest or religious by name or face who was crucial to your faith journey? Was it easy for you to believe? Did you enjoy praise and worship? Do you have a favorite song or hymn? Were you excited to make your first-communion and confirmation? Do you go to confession regularly? How much have you grown in your faith?

When faith was lost:

Did you ever lose your faith? Did you stop practicing your faith while in high-school or college? Do you remember why you were separated from God? Were there consequences of that separation? Did you feel lost or that something was missing in your life? Did you do sinful or regretful things? Were you in danger for your physical or spiritual life? Did you stop praying? Caring? Were you more selfish and disconnected from God's plan? What made you look or search for your God? How did you find God again? Did you get help? What did you learn from this? Were you joyful? Did this lead to a stronger more deliberate faith in God? Did your reunion with Jesus affect the way you see yourself as a servant of God, thus a lover of souls? Has His presence changed you? Does Jesus affect all your decisions?

God's plan for you:

Jesus said to Peter, "If you love me, feed my sheep." We are servants in His vineyard. He will gather the produce at the appointed time. We are His witnesses to the ends of the world. As Disciples of Christ, our hope is heaven and its benefit (Phil. 1:20-24). Are you beginning to see that God has a plan for you? Not to increase you with worldly things and pleasures, but to make you an instrument of His love and peace. Therefore, we too are "seeds", the Word of God sown by God. So does your faith naturally flow out in service to your fellow men, especially those who are in need? Does your love for God inspire charity? Is your Christian piety an expression of a pure, humble and loving heart, or are you self-righteous and critical? Are you being true to your faith or are you Christian in name only; thus, do you take the name of the Lord in vain? Do you use God's gifts for your own profit or are you His prophet?

Jesus sought the counsel of godly men and God the Father as He grew in knowledge of His Sonship. Our mission and ministry here on earth is always a participation in the one mission of God. Without God we do not accomplish God's plan for us or anyone else. Many a false prophet aimed to do their own will while calling on the name of God. They were like wolves in sheep's clothing. Woe to the shepherd who does not shepherd rightly. We must serve God and God alone. His will and glory we honor and His righteousness we seek.

Saturday afternoon: The Passion of Jesus

The Fourth Sorrow: Mary meets her afflicted Son (Luke 23:27-28)

And a large crowd of people followed Jesus, as He carried His cross, including many women who mourned and lamented him. He turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children."

It is painful to imagine Mary here. There is too much emotion for the average heart to bear; but not for this "Daughter of Zion". Mary knows that a New Jerusalem is being built; that the old must pass away, for God's children will be a new creation born of Spirit and truth. Nevertheless, this too will cause much pain, as in childbirth. What pain must precede the birthing of one's truth and ultimately one's spirit?

Why do we call it the Passion of the Cross?

Jesus embraces the cross. He holds it against his broken and bleeding skin, cut so deep from scourging, that his blood covered its wood. *Behold the wood of the cross.* This wood carried the weight of our sins and the sins of the whole world. He embraces it still. His blood covers our sins and consummates the wedding covenant God makes through His perfect love. So intimate a scene, where love and mercy meet, our heartbeats hasten, so full, we can hardly breathe or look; but we must worship.

The road to Golgotha:

In spite of her great sorrow, could Mary too have seen a vision of God's glory in her Son's eyes? Could it have been so for Mary? A heavenly mystery unfolding before her eyes—a parable, thus paradox of the kingdom of heaven; the glorious last leg of a race well run? The 23 Psalm comes to mind again: "Yea though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death. I fear no evil..." Even now God is triumphant. "Behold, [He] makes all things new" (Rev. 21:5). And thus, this horrible suffering, this gruesome work of

our salvation is the joy of heaven. If we should shy away from His witness, if overcome by sorrow, how could we receive the graces to carry our cross, to keep the faith, to trust in hope, so to finish the race?

Do not weep for me:

The Son of Man came to serve and not to be served, and to give His life as a ransom for the many. Jesus has not landed on bad luck here. This is what Love does, what perfect Love delights in. St Paul reminds us that, “Though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave... he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6-8). Again, “He learned obedience from what he suffered, and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (Heb. 5:9). This is the price that is paid for those who belong to the devil because of sin, they must be redeemed. Atonement for sin must be offered. But the Christ is no bullock or red heifer. What God does instead, is put an end to empty sacrifices. From now on, the redeemed shall take up their cross and follow Him. Do not weep for Him, you too must take up your cross and follow. For blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me. Rejoice and be glad for your reward will be great in heaven. (cf. Mt. 5:11-12)

Weep instead for yourselves and your children:

The real tragedy here is not the fate of the Christ, but the state of our hearts. We inflict great suffering on the sons of man. Mary knows, firsthand, the hardness of our hearts, but full of grace, she is full of love for the sake of His sorrowful passion. Mary holds the suffering of her Son and her Lord so dear, that she descends the heavens herself to intercede for us. She prays for the salvation of souls and grieves, with much sorrow, those who are being lost on account of their lack of love. It is not for her Son that she is inconsolable, but for her adopted children, she weeps and begs God’s mercy. Her great sorrow is directly proportional to her great love. (cf. Heb. 5:7-9)

We too must learn obedience through suffering. Do not be fooled by those who say that Christ suffered so that we would not have to. For God’s judgment still remains. He ransomed us from death, but death still has its hold on us. His death bought reconciliation from sins, thus opened the gates of heaven, but we must repent to pass. His love won for us an advocate, comforter and sanctifier to plead our case, wash us clean and clothe us in His righteousness, but we must be obedient and true—we must live and walk in the Spirit. His resurrection is our rising from the dead, our heavenly hope, but we too must die to ourselves in loving Him. God’s grace is a free gift, but it is not cheap or cheapened by false prophets who would feed us false hope for their own satisfaction. God is not fooled. A clear path must emerge from our suffering to our love; for only through suffering are we perfected in love.

The Fifth Sorrow: The Son of Man is Crucified (John 19:17-18, 25-27).

And carrying the cross by himself he went to the Place of the Skull, in Hebrew, Golgotha. There they crucified him and with him two others, one on either side with Jesus in the middle. Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom He loved, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold your son.” Then he said to the disciple. “Behold, your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her in to his own home.”

The strength of these women is not measurable by any mechanical means. It is not muscle or grit, but the strength of love that holds them like a magnetic force emulating from His heart, although near death, grows stronger with love. These last words of a breaking heart struggling to breathe call a mother to action, to do the impossible but the necessary. Mary already stands with family and they have stood by her, for the bond of family runs true and deep for these women; but again, Jesus reminds her that she is not only mother but “Woman”. She is the New Eve, the faithful spouse that must help to make a new beginning of humanity. The beloved disciple is now her son, and a new family of believers in God’s Word will be called mother, sister and brother. (cf. Lk. 8:21) The family bond will continue to be the glue that holds us together, but from now on blood and water will give rise to a church filled with of the children of God—a new creation and a new temple for the Holy spirit.

Though the irony of the Son of Man’s betrayal is blinding, Mary sees through the eyes of grace, and in her great sorrow is still able to let go; for it is written that the Son of Man is abandoned and forsaken. She joins the desolate and does as she is told, obedient and faithful to the end, and forever (*Stabat Mater Dolorosa*). Even now, at the foot of the cross, she takes up her cross—she lets go only to embrace us.

And he was reckoned with transgressors although he had done no wrong:

The prophet Isaiah’s suffering servant songs allow us to enter more fully into this great sorrow. “Counted among the wicked, (Jesus) my servant shall take away the sins of many, winning pardon for their offenses.” Here we also have both the suffering and triumphant love of the Lord expressed in a seamless whole. (Read all of Isaiah 53, beginning with 52: 13-15)

For I tell you this scripture must be fulfilled in me:

The work of our redemption was fulfilled in Christ, the living Word of God and Bread of Life. Now consider Mary’s passion: The mother who shared in His life now shares in His death. It was her blood that fed Him in her womb. With joy, she wept to deliver. Fed Him in her arms and filled Him with her love. His love now emptied upon the ground; on darkest soil to nourish. That in the end the good shall flourish. Blood and water flowing from His side, the sacramental font of the Church, fills the hearts of God’s children. Only then it is finished. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish, but might have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16).

Woman, behold thy son; son behold thy mother:

For Jesus, the work of our salvation is finished, but for His fledgling church it has only begun. He gave us all that we need for our salvation, but we are a stiff-necked people. Each and every one of us is called and sent, baptized, thus christened to do our part. Mary is given to us and we’ve been given to her by Jesus. Jesus knew that we would need each other. That the company we keep and the community that we make, go far beyond our social welfare to our spiritual hope. He wants us to be one with Mary, as her Immaculate Heart is eternally bound to His. Just as He prayed before He died, that we would be one in Him, as He is one with the Father, that they may be one in Us. He gives us His mother, confident in the fulfilment of her “Yes” to ensure ours. She is our help, and together, we are His Church. Mary is the Mother of God, mother of the Disciples of Christ, and mother of the Church of Christ. She is the Ark of the New Covenant—The Messianic Daughter of Zion and eschatological Woman—Spouse (Virgin Bride). She is the “Woman”, (the New Eve) crowned with a diadem of stars with the serpent under her

feet. (cf. Gen. 1; Rev. 12) She is mother and bride, thus Mediatrix and Co-redemptrix with God in the work of our salvation. We can do no better than to take her into our home.

Silent reflection

Only suffering without the hope of heaven is cause for despair. Once Jesus resigns himself to God's plan, He makes all things new. Can this too be your joy? Will you suffer for the greater good? What does your cross look like? Does it look like Jesus' or is it something different? Is it a work of love? Is it accomplishing a greater good, or is it for your own benefit? Do you use it, but don't embrace it (Do you carry it out of obligation or love?) Is it heavy with the weight of a sorrowful and needy world, or is it laden with your own sin and greed? Is it love that makes you persevere, or your pride and vanity? Does it draw others to faith, or cause others to sin? Is it your doubt and fear of death, or is it your freedom in spite of suffering and death? Do you wear the cross like a talisman around your neck for protection from evil, or do you live its mystery in your body; hence, have you become its sign that destroys evil and strengthens faith and hope?

How has the Passion of Christ changed you?

Are you inspired by this great witness of God's love for you? Does it make you desire to love Him more? Does it inspire you to be a witness yourself, or fill you with fear for the cost of discipleship?

Do you hope in God only for this world? Is your faith a quid pro quo relationship with God? Do you love God only when things are going your way, and lose faith when things go wrong? Do you truly believe in the resurrection; thus, need not fear death? Do you still ask for more than you need in this life while knowing your greater need is for the virtues that come from suffering and a dying to oneself?

Do you believe in God's unconditional love for you? Does His love inspire transformation in your life? Can you then forgive yourself as He always longs to forgive your sins? Do you detest sin for the sake of His sorrowful passion? Do you live hoping in heaven? Do you embrace small sacrifices for sinners daily? Do you love your neighbor with the love that comes from God's love and for God's sake? Do you repent because of love of God and not fear of hell?

How have you embraced the call to holiness and mission?

Do you witness to the glory and love of God with your body and life? Do you see yourself as a worthy disciple of Christ? Are you willing to help Jesus carry the cross, even if it means suffering? Will you feed His sheep even though they are unworthy and lost? Will you intercede daily for the Church's living and dead? Will you live Mary's example heartily and take her into your home? Will you see in Mary's faith the pure beauty of the Christian vocation and strive, with her intercession, to emulate this perfect call to love and to serve God? Can this too be your joy?

Saturday evening: The Burial of Jesus

The Sixth Sorrow: The body of Jesus is taken down from the cross (Mark 15:43-46)

Joseph of Arimathea took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. When he learned that Jesus was already dead, he granted the body to Joseph. Joseph bought a new linen shroud, and taking Jesus down, wrapped Jesus in it. (Also read Psalm 130)

Surrender:

Traditionally, it is taught that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was also there when Jesus was taken down from the cross. Many a *Pieta Mater* was inspired by this most probable event. Imagine the body of our Lord taken down from the cross and placed in His mother's arms. Many artists were inspired by this event, but the most famous is Michelangelo's *Pieta*. Here we see our mother Mary in total surrender in the midst of intense suffering. Her expression is not without emotion, but not what we would expect. The artist seizes the opportunity to enter more deeply into the mystery of her faith; not to discount the intense suffering that is here, he attempts to show her intense hope in God. This surrender is not weakness, but strength. This complete trust and utter surrender to God's will, puts Mary in a state of peace. In this place of surrender and resignation to the mystery of God's unfolding will, she knows that giving in to fear is for the faithless, and despair is for the hopeless. What is needed is to worship. What is needed is to adore.

Had we not come this far by faith, we would despair. Death would hold us instead. Death would rob us of Love's deepest witness and greatest trust. Mary concedes nothing to Death, but surrenders to the greater mystery of God's love. Thus, all that was given, all that was received, is now surrendered to God who gave it. Love is set free, yet remains in hearts unbound by fear and full of hope.

The crucified body of Christ:

Mary holds the body of her abandoned and crucified Lord. She yearned to comfort Him. And only now can she embrace Him. Here is sorrow indeed, but also great love. She, no doubt, remembers the many times she sought to protect Him. Mary grew up, herself, learning the true nature of love. She knows that love exists not for itself, but for the sake of the beloved. She knows that her Son is the greatest lover. There is no greater love than this—to give one's life for the sake of sinners. In her arms lies perfect love, merciful love. The crucified body of our Lord is for many, the greatest sign of hope, not just hope in the resurrection of the body, but the assurance of God's unconditional love for us all. Christ died for our sins to show us that God's love is greater than all our sins. God's greatest desire is to save us. However, we must be moved, impelled by His love, to follow Him. We strive to live and to die well. This is how we are saved: He is the grain of wheat that willingly falls to the ground and dies in order to bear much fruit (cf. Jn. 12:24). All shall die and rise, but not all shall be saved. It is love that saves us from death; merciful love that saves us from our sins. Only our self-sacrificing love can save the world.

The Seventh Sorrow of Mary: Jesus is laid in the tomb (John 19:41-42)

Now in the place where Jesus was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb where no one had ever been laid... They laid Jesus there.

At this point Mary is probably emotionally exhausted, but relieved. From the silence of her heart, she whispers, "Rest in peace." No more can sinful, hateful men wound You in the flesh. No more can their blasphemous insults and tests tempt the Holy Spirit in Your presence. Now only from afar do the sins of man bring disappointment and pain. However, Mary knows that sin is still an abomination to God; thus, more must suffer and die, and more must feel the injustices and insults of sinners until the end of time. But His passion, this work of our redemption is finished; she must go on. She would rather be with her Son, but her work is not yet done. She knows that God does not rest, but she wishes her Son "peace" in the darkness and silence of this faithful night that we call "good". She prays for His kingdom to come.

Hope:

There was talk of death and resurrection, but they did not understand. Their hope was an earthly hope. Their vision of an earthly Messiah is now dead. I have seen people linger around a grave, unable to gather the hope to leave. But there is more here. Those who truly loved Him, those who were content with simply being in His loving presence still felt His love. No doubt, the pain of separation we experience for a loved one is intense, but the love we shared, the friendship that was woven in life, does not simply unravel in death. It remains, not in some ghostly memory, but in heartfelt truth, we remember.

The fulfilment of our hope is the kingdom of God. The reason Jesus came was to tell us about this life beyond death and its scourges. For we know that we must all die one day. The miracles that the disciples have not yet seen are the love of the Holy Spirit and God's heaven and its rewards. The Spirit reminds us of everything. We remember Christ as heartfelt truth that lives. Hope that does not disappoint transcends this earthly realm. Ultimately, our hope is in heaven. In remembrance of Christ, we celebrate this truth.

Hope that does not disappoint:

The beloved disciples, who stayed with Jesus to the end, do not simply want Him back. They followed Him for no financial, physical gain or selfish ambition. They desired Him completely and would have chosen to die with Him in a death like His. Now that Love has blossomed, this separation from Him feels hell, like an expulsion from Eden, though they had done not wrong. They cannot simply go back, for love has opened their hearts to a greater hope and faith to an even greater vision of Love. [Hope, as the second of the three Theological Virtues is a gift from God. They relate and work in tandem with each other, forming the basis of our relationship with God; e.g., the greater our faith, the greater our love for God and the greater our desire to be with Him]. Therefore, the object of our hope is union with God for all eternity. You might say that the very love of God grants us this grace to hope in Him. So hope, again, is aided by our faith and our love. St. Paul concludes, "So faith, hope and love remains, but the greatest of these is love" (Cf. 1 Cor. 13:13). Only love remains in heaven. We need not have faith or hope in heaven. We are simply in Love. Could you imagine loving God even more; loving until we are one with Him? Yes! This is the Beatific Vision—Union with God in heaven. We can only imagine, but why imagine when we can be in Love now. The wedding feast of our Lord has begun; let us prepare to welcome Him, for through Him we will find our way to one another. We cannot go back; we must go on.

The fulfilment of our hope is love:

The fulfilment of our hope is love. Love is the unbreakable faithful vine (Jesus) that holds us together in God. Whether we know it or not, we choose to or not, we are in Love. Our job is to consciously abide in Love, to stay rooted in Love. Love never forces us to remain, even though it has its conditions, for Love cannot be unjust or sinful. We must love as Love is. We, therefore, must love freely for Love's sake. And if Love finds us worthy it beckons us to come closer, to abide. Even as it strips us of our selfishness and pride, and sifts us of our hatreds and fears, it kneads us until we are ready for its crucible, making us into bread—God's sacred food for man's sacred feast. (cf. Kahlil Gibran, *the Prophet*)

Can this love be even now?

God's love exists even now, but its fullness is felt only in heaven. We need not spend our lives hoping in a future that does not exist now. We need not compartmentalize our lives in segments; e.g., now we

suffer, tomorrow we die, and then come the resurrection and hope. No, this makes life sorrowful indeed. Qoheleth of Ecclesiastes sees times and seasons as simply the passing episodes of our lives, and all is vanity. He knows no reason for our toils and sorrows; he has no faith in heaven and, therefore, no hope. We, however, can see from our greater perspective, the mystery of our lives forming a tapestry of beauty and hope, among its brighter and darker hues of passing times and seasons, a tapestry of love.

The wedding feast of our Lord:

Love is here now, unbound by time and space. Love bears all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never fails. (cf. 1 Cor. 13) Love is God. And God is love. This love is prepared for us now and for all eternity. This love is why we are living; this love is why we are dying. Beloved, seek what is above where all is united in love. If only you knew the love of God? I don't think that St. Paul asks this as some hope for tomorrow, but now. God loves you now. And you can love Him now and feel this love so intensely that it impels you. Jesus is the Bridegroom and we are His beloved. We are never alone. We are never unloved. We are always in Love. The Mass is our celebration of this love, a foretaste of the heavenly wedding banquet, the one and eternal remembrance of Jesus' "Yes" to us; to be one with His beloved — as an eternal offering pleasing to God. A match made in heaven, received under our roof.

To love like Thee

No little love is spared/ No longer hung with sin/ Unbroken bone, though pierced and stripped/ wrapped in linen cloth Thy broken skin/ That love might one day walk on water without fear/ and angels lift us through the air/ Still heavy hearts now full/ Strain Thy mother's breasts to breath so drenched of sorrow/ But there is hope, not tomorrow but now/ For now Thy kingdom come/ As Thou descend into the earth/ Prepared for our rebirth / Shall set the captives free/ From sin to love like Thee. (Mine)

Silent reflection

Surrender:

Do you see how faith has brought us here? Here at the altar of surrender. To be resigned to the will of God for our lives; to accept no less or more than what God has prepared for us is true serenity. To trust in God's love alone. We could not arrive here without the graces received throughout the challenges of our journey. Can you now see the benefit of surrender? Is there freedom in your resignation to God's will? Is this the way you understand faith? Or is your faith dependent on some other love you desire in this life?

Hope:

Is the hope of heaven your greatest goal in this life? Is the fate of all God's children included in this hope? Is this hope worth living and dying for? Does this hope make life easier? Do you pray daily for your children and the souls of your departed loved ones? Do you live on earth so as to gain heaven's reward? Do you use the things that pass so as to hold onto the things that are eternal? Will you abandon yourself to God's divine providence?

Love:

Are you in love with Jesus? Do you believe that love is God's greatest gift? Do you pray diligently for the grace to love Him more? Do you seek to experience God's love through prayer, devotions, music and

bible study, etc.? Do you know that love for God naturally leads to love for neighbor? Do you love only out of fear of punishment or hell? Do you love yourself and others for God's sake, or because it's church teaching? Do you know and trust in God's love even when you don't feel it? Do you love going to Mass? Do you make it about your love for Christ and His invitation to be one with Him? Is the goal of your faith union with God? If so, what do you do to prepare to welcome Him? Do you pray daily to be worthy of His love, thus to love others more? Do you seek healing for a broken or hardened heart? Do you realize that your heart tells everything about yourself e.g.: your ability to love or to hate, to forgive or to condemn, to give or to hoard, to trust or to judge, to care or to be careless, to accept or to reject, etc. God sees into our hearts and there discovers what we have done with His Spirit.

Sunday morning: Closing Presentation

Mary, Our Lady of the Rosary:

Mary encourages us to pray her rosary daily. The rosary gives us an opportunity to meditate on the life of Christ in the joyful, sorrowful, glorious and luminous mysteries. At its beginning, we also pray for an increase in faith, hope and love until we too are full of grace and do all things with faith, hope and love. Without the light of God's grace, we could not use the passing things of this world, so as to hold fast to that which endures forever, see the beauty of those truly blessed or desire to share in the suffering of a sinful world. Without grace, we would not humble ourselves so as to aspire to our resurrection and the hope of heaven. Without prayer, we cannot obtain the graces we need to live a faithful life.

Mary, Our Lady of Sorrows:

The relationship between sorrow and love is revealed in Christ, in Mary and in those whose great love draws them into the saving sacrifice of God. (cf. Heb. 5:7-9) We have lost our desire for suffering in this way. We need not strive for martyrdom in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, but we must not shrink from our witness to the heroic love of Christ. There is no greater love than this. Great love always embraces suffering for the sake of the beloved. This is why in Mary we have a true vision of martyrdom. Although she sheds no actual blood, she is the Queen of Martyrs through her willingness to suffer with Her Son, thus still giving her own flesh and blood (her Son) for the glory of God, and the love of souls. Those who love much will suffer much for who they love. We need not be ashamed of this suffering; in fact, we should rejoice for being found worthy to share in the sufferings of Christ. (Acts 5:41)

It is very important that we know that the suffering we choose to embrace is precious and not to be wasted. We joyfully suffer for the sake of the salvation of souls; but we should not enable people to hurt themselves or others. We should not willingly suffer the abuses of those who would destroy our lives. We should not enable others to stay in a state of sin that leads to death. Jesus often put to test the faith of those who asked for His help, neither assuming nor pre-judging their worthiness to receive His gift, but always being open to help them in their need. Many Gentiles were healed for they had great faith in spite of their labeling or sins. We too might be surprised by the miracles God can work through us.

Still, there are times when we too must give in spite of apparent unworthiness. Jesus said to do good to the sinner and to love our enemies. I say keep some distance as you do, so that your losses may still be your gain. Remember that suffering cannot be avoided for those who love, and love is not unscathed by those who are in need of its grace. Love requires mercy and mercy requires sacrifice.

Mary, Mother of Faith:

Mary is the universal sign of a faithful mother who gives rise to a new creation and the fulfilment of God's promise. She is the fruitfulness that carries within the Christ (Abraham's descendant) from whom God's promise revisits His people, resulting in countless children of faith and the hope of heaven. St. Paul says it is those who have faith who are true children of Abraham, through whom shall all the nations be blessed. Consequently, those who have faith are justified along with Abraham (the father of faith). Now the promises of God were made to Abraham and his descendant (the Christ) (Gal. 3:16; Gen 12:7); that through faith in Jesus Christ, the promise might be given to those who believe (Gal. 3:22). Mary carried the promised seed of Abraham, the Christ (Gal. 3:16); conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of faith (her "Yes" to God). This is now the way by which we are reborn as true children of God. (v. 29) Mary too, like Abraham, gave her firstborn to God. Through this "Daughter of Zion," a New Jerusalem is born; born of faith, reborn of faith in the Christ. We are God's children now through faith, what our hope envisions has not yet come to light, but we walk by faith and not by sight, as though already sharing in the glory of God.

Mary, Mother of the Children of God—the Church:

Mary forever makes her home with God's children, born of faith and true heirs of God's kingdom. She is our mother who forever reminds us that we are all God's children now. At the cross, Christ gave her to us. Then, at Mary's Assumption, God raised her, body and spirit from the dead, again giving her to us now for all eternity. The giving of Mary to the beloved disciple prefigures this dogma of the Church. She is given to us by God to help keep us together as one family forever; forever reminding us to believe in her Son, to have faith. Therefore, Mary is never far from us in our needs and even warns us of coming threats and dangers. She intercedes for us and her example and steadfast love give us needed encouragement. She is honored in this way for our benefit. In Mary, we have a mother with all the faces of humanity, an Immaculate Heart that beats and bleeds for all humanity and the one Spirit that forever instructs us to do whatever Christ tell us.

Mary, Mother Immaculate in Love:

True love comes from God, who is Love. Mary's heart is united with the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the font of love and mercy, as we have seen. Her love flows directly out from the heart of Jesus. Thus, in her loving, Mary is drawn to the sinner, the afflicted, the sorrowing, the sick and the lost, just as Jesus was in His ministry. Her generous, self-sacrificing, merciful and obedient heart has the power to change hearts that are hardened and cold. This Immaculate Heart is not only a reference to its absence of sin (The Immaculate Conception), but also her singular devotion to love in love's purest sense—love for the sake of love.

The four chambers of her Immaculate Heart are: obedience of faith, generosity of spirit, trusting in hope and self-sacrificing love. Mary keeps herself in this state of grace, where she can only glory God. Mary's singlehearted devotion, gives her the grace to love for the sole benefit of souls without fear of loss. This is love in its purest sense; love undefiled by fear, self-interest or any other self-gratifying reason, except loving for love's sake—love rejoicing in the will of God. To love what God loves for God's sake is the key to an immaculate heart that beats only for love; thus, to love purely.

Mary, Our Lady of Perpetual Help:

Mary is the mother we can run to with all our fears and sorrows. If we had faith the size of a mustard seed, we could move mountains. So we are always praying for God to increase our faith. But for God's grace to increase in us, we must decrease. This is easier said than done. In our faith journey, we will find that help is never too much. All the saints in glory are mindful of this. No need to question where our allegiance stands, when the saints are all united in God. However, we know we can always run to Mary. Remember, Jesus, Himself, gave her to us.

Run to Mary

When faced with frightening news and confused/ When life comes to your womb unplanned and threatened by unrighteous hand/ Hemmed in by those whose blame, sin drives from home and kin/ Our life is in His care, still His dying we must share/ When all that's given is asked of you and to God you must be true/ When bad news comes from unexpected places and betrayal from friendly faces/ When love is full but rejected and men are few but infected/ God's plan commands our all, still time and time we fall/ When life, unfair and unjust, still demands your trust/ The devil at our heel and earthly courts give no repeal/ When you're an alien in God's land trusting in God's plan/ When you are worn and weary, run to Mary. (Mine)

Conclusion:

Reflecting on Mary's life deepens our understanding of the Paschal Mystery (Jesus' life, death and resurrection). She is full of grace, hence does all things through the virtues of faith, hope and love. She witness to Christ through her struggle, resurrection and hope, thus shows us how to apply God's graces as children of light. Her God given virtue does, indeed, open our minds and hearts to a deeper more glorious revelation of her Son's suffering, her own, and thus, our own suffering too. Just as Simeon foretold, "And you yourself [Mary] a sword will pierce so that the thoughts of many minds and hearts will be revealed." We have endured seven such swords, and received graces beyond this written word. These graces have been given to us by God and revealed through the heart of Mary. Her hope is in the wedding feast of our Lord. (cf. Jn. 2:4) Her faith is in the Bridegroom and her last words ensure His love, "Do whatever He tells you" (Jn. 2:5). Hail Mary, full of grace...

Silent Reflections

We, too, like Mary will see better through the eyes of our faith, hope and love. Where are you in all this? When reflecting on your own suffering, will you apply this perspective? Will you consider developing your own seven sorrows rosary? Choose seven of the most difficult times of your life's journey and pray, asking Mary to intercede for you through the recitation of the Hail Mary. Praying your own sorrows will invite God's grace into your life and reveal to you the greater mystery therein; transforming your sorrows by faith into hope and love. Begin now to see your life as a mystery, and the fulfillment of your own "Yes" to God, led by Jesus and aided by the Holy Spirit. Then at last, when we stand at the altar in heaven, an eternal offering with Christ, our "Yes", our "Amen," will resound with joy for all eternity.

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