



Mary, the heart of the Mystical Body
The Seven Sorrows Rosary, Week 1

The Body of Jesus is Placed in the Tomb

In St. John's Gospel (19:38-42) we read about Jesus' burial, the seventh of Mary's sorrows: "After this, Joseph of Arimathea, secretly a disciple of Jesus for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate if he could remove the body of Jesus. And Pilate permitted it. So he came and took his body. Nicodemus, the one who had first come to him at night, also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing about one hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and bound it with burial cloths along with the spices, according to the Jewish burial custom. Now in the place where he had been crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had yet been buried. So they laid Jesus there because of the Jewish preparation day; for the tomb was close by."

Jesus' burial reminds me of another passage from St. John's Gospel (12:23-26): "Truly, truly I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

Christ allowed himself to become the grain of wheat fallen into the ground; he gave himself as bread broken, completely broken. Once he went into the tomb was everything finished? Was it all over? We know for sure that it didn't! The grain of wheat that died produced a rich harvest that keeps on giving to this day, and in the bread broken and blessed, there is always new life. Christ will always be present among us in the Eucharist, through his Spirit and in his Mystical Body.

The Church's teaching on the Mystical Body is so beautiful and uplifting. I'd like to borrow again today from Father Donald Calloway because he does a really good job writing about the Mystical Body. "Through Baptism and the Eucharist we are incorporated into the Mystical Body. Each of us has a mission and a vocation and is called to cooperate" with Jesus the head, with the Holy Spirit, the soul, and with Mary, the heart of the Mystical Body, in order to flourish and produce fruit for the body."

The mystical Body gives us the privilege of being able to offer up our sufferings to Christ. Saint Paul tells us, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Col 1:24). On one level there is nothing lacking in the work of salvation that Jesus has accomplished, Father Calloway writes. “However, he desires his followers to participate and contribute their own sufferings to his, so that he can continue his saving work in and through us.” He lives in his members and incorporates their sufferings and hardships into his own body, giving them a redemptive quality.” Jesus invites his followers to be sharers in his cross and co-sufferers with him. In this way the cross each of us is invited to carry becomes life-giving.

“No one loved more, or was more co-victim with Christ, than Mary,” Fr. Calloway writes. “... As the heart of the mystical body, she never stopped beating; she never died. It was the desire of Jesus, the head, that the heart, Mary, animated and sustained by the Holy Spirit, keep the members of the body (and you and me) alive while he experienced death for our sake. This makes Mary the very heart of hope: our life, our sweetness and our hope.”

“Mary was interiorly crucified with Jesus, having her own maternal heart torn apart. But she offered it all to God and underwent her own tortuous agony in union with Christ, so that souls could have life. God thus made her the ultimate model for the co-suffering, co-redeeming Church.... She shows us how to give all of our pain and suffering to Jesus so it can be used for good....

As Christ lay in the tomb for three days, “Mary held it all together,” believing and completely trusting in the truth of all that he had said. “She was the heart of hope. We can have total confidence to go to her with all of our needs, all of our brokenness and all of our wounds.”

Mary has always held it all together, hasn’t she? We have always been able to go to her with all of our needs, our brokenness and our wounds, but also our hopes and dreams. In Panama Pope Francis told young people they should be able to count on the older generations to provide them with roots and foundations from which they can grow. I think it would be a really wonderful Easter gift if we who are older — whether a little older or a lot — could help the young people we know discover a relationship with Mary, the Mother of hope who stands beneath every Cross and who will lead them to the pierced heart of her Son, the font of all mercy.

As we conclude these meditations on Mary’s seven sorrows I’d like to reflect on one more excerpt from Pope Francis, this one the conclusion to his original message for World Youth Day 2019. He asked the young to meditate on Mary’s love, and I would invite you to do that now with her seven sorrows as your point of departure. “Contemplate Mary’s love: a caring, dynamic





and concrete love. A love full of boldness and focused completely on the gift of self,” Pope Francis wrote. “A Church permeated by these Marian qualities will always be a Church going forth, one that goes beyond her own limits and boundaries to let the grace she has received overflow. If we allow ourselves to be truly touched by Mary’s example, we will live out authentically that charity which urges us to love God above all else and above ourselves, to love those with whom we share our daily life. And we will also love those who may seem hardly lovable in themselves. It is a love that is service and dedication, above all towards the weakest and poorest, love that transforms our faces and fills us with joy.”



We’ve come to the end of this series on Mary’s seven sorrows, and soon we will step with her into the joy of Easter! We’ve spent seven weeks reflecting on Mary’s bold, concrete and undying love. I hope this has inspired you to imitate these Marian qualities and to reach out to others, especially the young. As you continue to contemplate the mysteries of the rosary don’t forget that meditating on these mysteries releases their saving power into the world anew, so we can help to lift up the world at a time when our world really needs lifting up!

Scripture doesn’t recount the reunion between Jesus and his Mother on Easter morning, but theologians and spiritual writers throughout history have voiced their certainty that Mary would have been the first person Christ sought out after his resurrection. Imagine her joy to receive her risen Son’s embrace! Our prayer for you this Easter is that you too will experience the warm and joy-filled embrace of the Risen Christ. On behalf of all the Little Sisters of the Poor and our elderly Residents around the country I wish you a very blessed Easter!