

Our Lady of Sorrows.

ONE of the greatest mysteries of religion is the close alliance between godliness and suffering. The nearer and dearer to God, the greater the share man has to take of the cross. The greatest loss a man can sustain is the loss of God, and a noble and high-strung, sensitive nature will be nearly rent in twain by the very fear of such a possible loss. This anguish is commensurate to the degree of love for God which a soul possesses.

Of all the mortals none loved nor could love God more intensely than His Mother, in whom the love of the Queen of all Saints was blended with the instincts of maternal love. Hence no mortal could feel suffering as keenly, or bear more of it, than the Mother of God, and such in fact was her lot in life. The Queen of Saints was to be likewise the Queen of Martyrs. But whilst the torments of martyrs were those of the body, buoyed up by the secure hope of a speedy recompense, and whilst these torments lasted but a short time, often but a few hours, Mary's sufferings were of a different nature, sufferings of the heart, more excruciating than any that can be inflicted upon the body, and sufferings which lasted uninterruptedly through a space of 48 years. They change in appearance, yet they are the same in essence; it is the anguish of a mother's heart asked to give up freely that which is much dearer to her than her own life and happiness, to sacrifice her Son for others, such a son and for such sinners, and by such a death.

And this Son is at the same time her God, her life, her all. He is not wrested from her by brutal force, he is not snatched away by the accidents of war and disease, he does not die away from her. He gives Himself willingly, and He expects His Mother to share in this voluntary sacrifice. His Incarnation was dependent on her free consent; she is asked also to freely consent to His death and her incumbent separation from him. Was ever mother asked before to give, as it were, the death-warrant of an innocent son, to make herself, as it were, an accomplice in His death? O, ye all, who pass by the way, behold and see if there is sorrow like my sorrow!

This sorrow commences the same hour in which, with feelings of love and tenderness, she presents her first-born to His Eternal Father in the temple. The first sword pierces her virginal heart when she learns that her child is set not only for the Redemption, but also for the fall of many in Israel! The prophecies of the old law in this moment gain for her an appalling distinctness. She trembles.

Soon the second sword presents itself. "He came unto His own, and His own would not receive Him." They go further, they seek His life, and the Saviour of Israel is bound to flee, to abide amidst idolaters in a foreign country and endure all the privations of poverty amongst strangers. What did the loving Mother suffer by

these reflections and her own banishment from home? Yet she still possessed her only treasure, her Divine Child. But before the hard exile in Egypt can vanish from her mind the third sword pierces her most keenly: she loses her child. For three days her soul is consumed by the anxious question: Is my Jesus alive yet, or has His expiatory death taken place unknown to me? And when she finds Him it is only to learn that He must be about His Father's business, that consequently he lives not for her but for the world. Now for the first time she realizes the heroic magnitude of the sacrifice demanded of her, she experiences what it is to live without her Jesus. This stinging transfixes her heart, and forever after it remains fixed there.

Years pass; they may somewhat dull the edge of this pain, they cannot efface it; the cross is everlastingly looming up before her agonized eyes. It gathers clearness, the enemies of her Son grow more numerous, their hatred intensifies, the persecutions increase, and at last hell seems to conquer; her Son is condemned to death, painfully dragging His heavy cross, disfigured by the cruelties practised upon Him, and thus He meets His afflicted Mother. The poignant pain of this meeting surpasses the preceding swords, and but for the extraordinary assistance of God His Mother could not receive this thrust and live. Yet the valiant woman follows the awful procession, for love is stronger than death. In rapid succession she receives three more swords: she sees her Son expire, she holds His inanimate body in her arms rendering to it the last offices of charity, she sees this body laid into the sepulchre, and this closed. Disconsolate she turns homewards. What she dreaded so long is accomplished: she is deprived of Him who was Her life, and in whose love she lived. She that begot Him without labor in Bethlehem, gave birth to Him for the world beneath the cross. Can a merely human mind fathom the horror of these sorrows, can the dolorous Mother herself ever forget her sacrifice?

Is it, therefore, to be wondered at when we find that Mary shows herself partial to those who have a great devotion to her sorrows, that she selected places almost innumerable where she wished to be venerated as the Mother of Seven Dolours, and that there are proofs without number that when invoked under this title, so dear to her and her Divine Son, she is always ready to help and to borrow, so to say, the omnipotence of her Son in behalf of her devotees. Hence we cannot direct our prayers this month more auspiciously than to Our Lady of Sorrows, and whenever our prayer is accompanied by a feeling of sympathy with and gratitude for the sacrifices Mary brought for us we may rest assured that our petitions will be granted.

An indulgence of 100 days can be gained each time a person recites the "Stabat Mater" with devotion, to honor the dolours of Our Blessed Lady.