

The Seven Dolour Rosary

Meditations.

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Go to Mary in Her Dolours.
Mary's Heroic Fiat.

AT the Annunciation, Heaven awaited in suspense the decision of Mary, a maid in her teens. No pressure was brought to bear upon her, for the decision had to be hers alone, made freely and willingly. It was not a decision made in the dark, for the Holy Spirit lifted the veil of the future and showed her the terrible cost of her consent. In that mysterious moment, when Mary the Virgin pronounced her all-powerful "Fiat" – 'Be it done unto me', in that moment she saw the whole series of events that were to happen during the entire human life of the Son she would conceive and give birth to. She knew that the Son of her womb would not come into the world for the pomp of royalty but for the shame of the Cross. At that moment of the Angel's appearance, Mary knew that the Mother of the Man of Sorrows must be the woman of dolours. Her "Fiat mihi" Be it done unto me according to your word, was her acceptance of a life of sorrow.

O Mother of the Redeemer, of Him who was to be "a worm and no man", we cast ourselves in profoundest reverence before you!

Mother of God, the greatest honour God could confer, but at an awful price! Seeing in detail what that price would cost her, nevertheless, she pronounced her self-offering: "Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum", 'Be it done unto me according to Your word'. With us, there is a kindness, a charity in the Providence which veils from our eyes the future and all that it might demand from us. Looking back now, we realise that had we seen what we should have had to face, we should have faltered and feared to go on. Not so Mary: she knew it all, saw it all in detail, and because it was His Will pronounced her resolute "Fiat". All the courage of the martyrs was concentrated in her then.

Dolours Began at the Annunciation.

Her dolours began on the day of the Annunciation and from that moment until the Resurrection her days were days of sorrow. It is the accepted tradition that Mary was only fourteen years of age at the Annunciation and fifteen at Bethlehem. From that moment of the Annunciation, she knew as no one else did or could know the amount of suffering to which she was offering Him, but she did not withdraw her hand. She offered Him as really as if she had taken the sacrificial knife that lay on the altar and slain Him. Saint Epiphanius calls the Virgin "a sacrificing priest".

With us, time lessens sorrow because it allows the wounds to heal. Time draws one's mind farther and farther away. With Mary, the years kept the wounds open and added fresh ones. As time drew her nearer to Calvary, it heightened the intensity of anticipation.

Reading Prophecies of Isaiah.

Daily she learned more and more of the worth of her Son and yet, she knew each day drew Him nearer to His Passion. An Angel told Saint Brigid that Mary grew up among sorrows as a rose among thorns, and that as the thorns grew with the roses, this chosen rose was tormented by the thorns the more she advanced in years. In their hours together at Nazareth, we can imagine on Fridays her reading the prophecies of Isaiah, knowing full well that the hour of their literal fulfilment was drawing nigh: "He shall be led like a sheep to the slaughter." As an under-current flowing through her life was the dreadful anticipation of the coming Passion. Even after the Ascension, she had the bitter remembrance of the Passion to haunt her thoughts, and those unhappy memories, together with the separation from her Son, kept her sad and full of grief until her death.

The Sharper the Sword the Deeper it Cuts.

The more finely tempered the steel the more sensitive it becomes. The sharper the knife, the deeper the cut. Mary said of her own soul that: "He that is mighty has done great things to me." Pope Pius IX comments on those remarkable words, saying, "that the highest angel in heaven with the luminous intelligence of the celestial spirits was unable to understand the inconceivable dignity of Mary at the first pulsation of her young life."

When the Divine Word became flesh in her blessed womb, nothing in heaven or on earth was comparable to Mary. As Mother of Christ, she surpassed in grace all angels and all men. What a mind, what a soul and what a capacity had that soul, so gifted, for suffering! She who was addressed by the Archangel Gabriel as "Full of grace" felt pain and sorrow second only to her Divine Son. Her gifts gave to her suffering a value immeasurably more than that of all created beings. What a mediatrix must she not be!

Why did Mary Suffer?

A fruitful thought is to ask ourselves, why did Mary suffer? Why had she, the immaculate one, the sinless one, to suffer and sorrow? Our Lord came down from heaven to suffer. In the wisdom of God, Our Lady too was pre-ordained to suffer. It was through suffering that Our Lord was to give glory to His Eternal Father. Suffering was His deliberate choice. In fact, the Son of God would not have come down from heaven but for His love of suffering as a gift to God.

Mary also gave glory to God through suffering. It was one of her graces to know the attraction that suffering had for Our Lord, and knowing that, she pursued it eagerly, and lovingly embraced it all her days on earth. She saw the Divine plan of life in the vision of Jacob's ladder: the uprights were God's glory and man's Redemption, and the cross-bars were sufferings and stripes, pains of body and anguish of soul.

Mother of the Man of Sorrows.

Another reason why Mary suffered was because it was fitting that the Mother should suffer with her Son. If the Son was the man of sorrows then the Mother should be the woman of dolours. Can we imagine it otherwise? If Jeremiah wept so bitterly over Jerusalem because of his love for that city, why should not she who so loved her Son weep with Him over the souls of men He came to save? We call her the co-redemptrix. She is the Mother of the Redeemer, and how could it be that having the heart of a mother her life could have been anything but a life of sorrow?

It was fitting also that she should suffer for her own sake. She was to lead us to heaven and heaven is won by suffering. She was to be next to Him in His Kingdom, so she should be closest to Him in suffering.

For our sakes, also, it was just and proper that she should suffer. Our Divine Lord suffered for us for two reasons, first, to redeem us, and second, to set us an example. Mary suffered to set us an example that we ought to bear our sufferings with fortitude, and associate them, as she did, with those of Our Divine Redeemer.

Walk with Mary in Her Sorrows.

“Forget not the sorrows of your Mother,” is the admonition of Ecclesiasticus. If you love her then go to her in her dolours and in sympathetic tears profess that love. Friendship and love is tried in the hour of affliction. Walk with Mary along her sorrowful way to Calvary, and through that sorrowing Mother’s heart approach Jesus, her Son and your God. How acceptable in the sight of God was that heart of Mary pierced with a sword! Remember also how it has increased her power of intercession with her Divine Son. It is to her and of her that the dying Christ addresses the last words spoken to any creature. His last legacy bequeathed His Mother to the disciple whom He loved and the disciple to His Mother.

Let us bring Mary into our lives as a living reality by frequently talking to her in the meditations of the Dolour Rosary, saying it especially on her Saturdays. The great lesson of the Dolour Rosary is to learn how essential suffering is for our souls. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to redeem us. The Son so loved us that He gave His life for us:

“Greater love than this no man has, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

The Dolours will bring us to Calvary along the Via Matris (the Way of the Mother). Let us stand beneath the Cross with her to share her sorrow and to ask her for strength to carry our cross. There we shall ask His pardon for our sins and the grace of final perseverance. Pardon is purchased for us by Christ on the Cross, but it is through the tears and prayers of His Mother, standing by the Cross that we hope that the gift of final perseverance will be granted to us.

Remember Her Tears.

She is His Mother, but she is ours also. Remember His Blood and remember her tears. Both were shed for us, one to redeem, the other to encourage and help us. May our devotion to the Seven Dolours increase and merit for us the reward promised by the “Stabat Mater” (By the Cross was Standing the Mother, her vigil keeping):

“Jesus, when earth’s shadows leave me

Through Your Mother’s prayers receive me

With the palm of victory.”

The foundation of true love for Our Lady depends on devotion to her Dolours. Devotion is not a cheap thing. It means more than words, for it asks for sacrifice, for self-offering, and for a constancy that is almost heroic.

Saturday is Dolours Day.

Saturday is Mary’s Day in the week, leading as it does to Sunday, the Lord’s Day. The Dolour Rosary would be a most acceptable gift to Mary on Saturdays. For many Saturday is Confession day. Our sorrow for our sins will be more sincere if we say the Dolour Rosary after Confession. The first Saturday in each month has become Our Lady of Fatima Saturday and we will gladden the heart of Mary if part of our fifteen minutes’ meditation becomes the Dolour Rosary.

(Consult the Appendix for instructions on how to say the Seven Dolour Rosary.)

MEDITATIONS ON THE SEVEN DOLOURS.

FIRST SORROW: SIMEON'S PROPHECY.

“And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His Mother: Behold this Child is set for the fall, and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a Sign which shall be contradicted;

“And your own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed.” — Luke 2:34-35.

MEDITATION:

This is the first official confirmation of the fears and thoughts which worried her since the Annunciation. This was a terrible shock for the young Mother. She is not yet sixteen and from now on Simeon's words, “Your own soul a sword shall pierce,” will be a dark cloud, shutting the sun of brightness out of her life. The terrible anticipation of the Passion will turn the joys of a young mother into bitter pain. As the Child advances in age and grace, the shadow of the Cross is ever present to His Mother. In imagination, we may lift the veil of Nazareth and listen in to the Holy Family when Mary reads aloud the prophecies, especially the words of Isaiah: “O all you that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.” Again: “He shall be led like a sheep to the slaughter and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearers and he shall not open his mouth. And we have thought him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted.” (Isaiah, 53:3-7).

How the Divine Child must have gone to His Mother and clung to her as the terrible truth of these words of doom came home to Him! And what a wound the words of Simeon made in the young mother's heart, a long festering wound of anticipated sorrow!

As Mary left the Temple that day, just forty days since the angels sang their Gloria on the hills of Bethlehem, she realized now why the Magi brought with their joyous gifts of gold and incense, the bitter, sad, and sorrowful gift of myrrh. (Or if this visit was still to come, as is more likely, she would understand the meaning of the gifts more crisply.) Mary could never have been really our Mother unless she had gone to Calvary with her Divine Son. Thus did she become the Mother of the afflicted. She can wipe away our tears because she understands sorrow. She can mend our broken hearts because her own was broken. Because she was the Mother of Sorrows, she is the Cause of our Joy.

PRAYER:

As we see you, a sweet young mother, a girl in years, for you are not yet sixteen, shy and graceful in appearance, delicately and modestly giving your Babe to Simeon for his blessing, we beg of you to grant us through this first dolour some of your courage, strength, and grace to accept whatever sorrow the Lord may send into our lives. You are little more than a child and already you have heard enough to break a woman's heart. A hush falls over heaven awaiting your reaction to this first shock, this first sword of sorrow. With no dramatics, no murmur of self pity, no word of reproach, you take the Babe in your arms, you kiss Him fondly, and your self-offering to the Will of God is as simply and calmly made as when you said to Gabriel: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to your word.”

Sorrows and heavy trials may come to us; and to you, most sorrowful Mother, will we fly to make them the means of drawing us closer to Jesus and to you.

SECOND SORROW: THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

“And after they (the wise men) were departed, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph, saying: Arise, and take the Child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt; and be there until I shall tell you. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the Child to destroy Him. Who arose, and took the Child and His Mother by night, and retired into Egypt: and he was there until the death of Herod.” — Matthew 2:13-14.

MEDITATION:

The young Mother was awakened by Joseph; she must fly at once in the darkness, if she was to save her child. Oh, that prophecy of Simeon! So soon! Swiftly she got ready, and during the bustle, she was terribly afraid, afraid for the life of the Child. In the long stretches of the desert Mary was in constant fear, the cries of the wild dogs at night terrified her, the unfriendly people in their strange caravans glared at her, and the anticipation of living in a hostile land made that journey to Egypt a nightmare. Though she held God in her arms, He did not make things easy for her. With a girl's fear, Mary was afraid throughout that long journey from Bethlehem to Egypt. Never before had she been among a strange people and many a tear did she shed during the years, she lived among a people who looked with scorn upon her own nation. (How many years was it? Was it one? Was it many?) If her missionaries are to leave home for her Son's sake, she must experience the bitter taste of exile. She must know what it costs to sever the ties of home and blood.

Saint Joseph had to earn the support of the Holy Family. A foreign carpenter would not find work easily and there must have been hungry days during those years in Egypt. Were the Egyptian women friendly towards her? Jesus was a boy among boys, his Divinity unknown to His companions. In those days, it was Mary, not Jesus, who feared. Jesus was not afraid yet, His time to be afraid would come in Gethsemane when His loving Mother was not with Him. On the return journey across the desert, Joseph was afraid and shared fully Mary's ever present anxiety and fear.

God expects us to use prayer and the Sacraments and to fly from danger. God could have preserved His Son without inflicting the fear of flight and the pain of exile upon Mary, but He demanded of her a prompt obedience to His Angel's command to arise in the night and fly at once. Mary and Joseph could, humanly speaking, delay until the morning's light. But no, they promptly and unquestioningly answered the call.

PRAYER:

We poor banished children of Eve are afraid also, and to you do we fly, O strong and dearest Mother. In this world of many dangers, we cannot always be beside our children, but do you, O Mother, help us to teach them the enormity of sin, and train them to fly from its dangerous occasions. You who did guard the Divine Child watch over us and our children, and after this, our exile show unto us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus, O ever glorious and blessed Virgin.

Mary, by this second dolour, teach us that God's ways are hidden in everything, even in those things that seem as far away as Egypt. The Flight into Egypt teaches us that there is nothing in life that cannot be spiritualized and turned into a prayer, provided we do it in union with Jesus.

Mary, we are slow to learn, tardy to understand, but do You impress upon us that we can make a Holy Land out of our daily toil, provided we bring with us Your Infant Child.

THIRD SORROW: THE LOSS OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE.

“And having fulfilled the days, when they returned, the Child Jesus remained in Jerusalem; and His parents knew it not. And thinking that He was in the company; they came a day’s journey, and sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances. And not finding Him, they returned into Jerusalem, seeking Him.” — Luke 2:43-45.

MEDITATION:

When Jesus was twelve years old, He went on foot with His parents from Nazareth, the long road of 80 miles to Jerusalem for the Solemn Pasch. The celebration over, the law required men and women to separate and leave the city by different gates. Thus, Jesus could withdraw from both Mary and Joseph, and each think He was with the other. As the first day’s journey was nearly over the families drew together, and boys, then as now, ran along by themselves. Thus, Mary and Joseph were not uneasy until evening when they “sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances.” But no one had seen Him. Mary’s heart sank lower and lower as in dismay, she moved from group to group enquiring.

What Mary had feared in the Flight into Egypt had overtaken her at home. This was probably the greatest sorrow in Mary’s life, the sorrow of separation. On the Cross, Jesus cried from His tortured soul: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” And Jesus had forsaken Mary now, as God afterwards forsook Him. If she cried bitter tears over it, it would be no more than He did. This “separation’s sorrow” was the crucifixion of her soul. All Mary’s other sorrows came from the cruelties of men. God Himself was inflicting this one.

Jesus was a Boy of twelve, still only a Child. Mary, mother-like, blamed herself for not having been more careful. Perhaps, in her humility, she thought her own unworthiness must be the cause. It is only mothers who can understand the fear and anxieties and pain of loss which Mary endured throughout two sleepless nights.

Mary and Joseph returned to Jerusalem enquiring of all by the way whether they had seen their Boy, Who was so manly yet so gentle, a striking Lad that everyone noticed and liked. No news, but the usual suggestions which only increased Mary’s fears and terrible forebodings. At last, on the third day they found Him in the Temple among the Doctors, and to Him Mary spoke:

“Son, why have You done so to us? Behold Your Father and I have sought You sorrowing.”

To this, the Child gravely answered:

“How is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?”

Was it any wonder that Mary who carried Him to Egypt to save His life, should now seek Him sorrowing? And Jesus knew she had been sorrowing. He had known it all through the three days, for had He not strengthened her to bear the separation from Him, she would not have survived.

PRAYER:

O sorrowing Mother, we thank you for the third dolour, because its bitter experience prepared you to become the Refuge of Sinners. You, the sinless one, had to taste the separation which sin causes if you would be tender, patient, and kind with sinners. It is sin and sin alone which deprives us of

the presence and company of Jesus in our hearts. When we give ear to our passions and heed the evil suggestions of the devil, we lose Jesus. The sinless Mother learns in the third dolour the plight of those who have lost Jesus by sin.

We can lose Jesus by mortal sin which separates the soul from God. Should that sad fate be ours, help us, dear Mother, to seek Him at once in the confessional, to seek Him sorrowing as you did throughout those three sad days.

There are other times when our soul is as arid as a desert, our hearts seem cold, and we find it hard to pray, and even begin to believe that perhaps God has forgotten us, because He seems so far away; whisper gently to us, dearest Mother Mary, the sweet reminder that even when we seem to have lost Him, He is still about His Father's business.

FOURTH SORROW: MARY MEETS JESUS CARRYING HIS CROSS.

“And there followed Him a great multitude of people, and of women, who bewailed and lamented Him.” — Luke 23:27.

MEDITATION:

Twenty-one years have passed since the third dolour. Eighteen years were spent in the calm and quiet of the home at Nazareth. Each day of those years was like a novitiate in which Mary learned more deeply her share of the Cross.

After those eighteen years, she parted with Him. He was then thirty and He must be about His Father's business. And now after thirty years of obeying and three years of teaching come His three hours of redeeming. That terrible Good Friday morning has dawned.

John, the beloved disciple, comes in with the news that Jesus has been condemned to death. Mary leaves her retirement to share openly with her Divine Son the humiliation, shame, and sufferings of the Cross. She takes her position in the narrow street to await Him. The procession comes in sight led by the Centurion on his horse. A Roman trumpet sounds and the crowd pushes on. Presently she sees the two thieves, the rough cross, the hammer and the nails, and then she sees only Him staggering under the Cross on which He is to die; thorn-crowned, and with blood streaming into His Eyes and clotting His hair and beard. The wounds of the scourging are covered by His robe but she sees the trickles of Blood from them running down over the bare feet, and leaving red marks on the road. He is defiled with spittle, buffeted and jostled, while the irritated Roman soldiers try to hold back the crowd that is lusting for His death and screaming: “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

Mary knew there must be a sacrifice of some sort, but she was unprepared for anything like this. This is her fourth sorrow but it is the first in which she has seen wounds and blood and utter degradation. For years, He had been her ideal Son, perfect in His stalwart manhood. When He returned each day, His work done, and greeted her affectionately, how proud she must have been of her Son! But what a spectacle He now presents!

She notices that the apostles are absent. Only John, thanks to his mother Salome, is present. Jesus is alone. He shall be alone no longer. She goes towards Him; the crowd gives way before her dignified insistence and she stands before Jesus. The eyes of mother and Son meet. What memories they share — Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth! She guided His Baby steps. She held her hands under His arms in His first attempt to walk; she said with Him His first prayers and taught Him how to read. She will be with Him now on His last journey to Calvary and death.

It is enough to break hearts other than His or hers, but Mary keeps a firm hand upon herself, and her courage impresses the soldiers, helps Simon of Cyrene to carry the Cross, encourages Veronica to wipe the blood and spittle off His Face, and touches the hearts of the women of Jerusalem who weep in sympathy. Mary follows Him, often stepping in the Blood of her Son. Simeon's prophecy is coming true, and in such terrible fashion that she is completely unprepared. Who would not weep at seeing this Mother's grief? But who has caused it? I and my sins had a share in it.

PRAYER:

O Virgin most holy, I crave pardon for the sorrows I have caused you. Show mercy to me and I promise to be more faithful to my Redeemer in the time to come and thus to console you, for this sad meeting with thy Son. I know that some reparation is required of me. God lays on each of us a cross that is heavy enough; sometimes it seems heavier than we can bear. The way of the cross is hard but it is the only road to heaven. Few take it by choice but it will be heavier if we drag it after us. The way of the cross is marked out by the Blood of Jesus Who first travelled it. And you, Mother Mary, were the first to practise perfectly the counsel of your Son: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me." Help me, O Mother mine, by your prayers and encouragement to endure gratefully and bravely my trials — pains of body and sufferings of soul — along that way of the cross which leads to heaven.

O sorrowful Mother, help me through the merits of the fourth sorrow to deny myself the craving for sensual pleasures and the alluring excitements which the world offers.

FIFTH SORROW: JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS.

"They crucified Him. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, His Mother. When Jesus therefore had seen His Mother and the disciple standing whom He loved, He says to His Mother: Woman: behold your son. After that He says to the disciple: Behold your Mother." — John 19:18-25 and 26-27.

MEDITATION:

Calvary is reached. They tear the garments off His Body; they drag them off so roughly that the skin comes with them. He is laid down on the cross. They press down on His knees and then the hammer blows are heard and the bite of the nail through His Feet. (What a haunting sound!) His arms are extended and again the hammer drives the nails through flesh and sinew. How those blows fall upon the heart of Mary! Upward they heave the Cross and let it fall with a thud into the hole prepared for it. What waves of pain must sweep over His Body! What a shiver of pain passes through us as we think of the effect of that jolt! And Mary is there to see and hear while the frenzied mob laugh and mock and shriek.

What a scene was that for Mary to witness! She had a mother's heart, gentle, loving, human. Let the mothers of children tell how she felt, they alone can explain. There are few things a mother will not do for a dying son. There was nothing possible that love could demand or suggest that Mary would not do for Jesus, yet she had to stand by and see Him suffer, and she could not help Him. You who know the relief it is to moisten the lips of the dying with a little water — what of the mother who stood by and heard her dying Son moan: "I thirst" — and could do nothing!

"There stood by the Cross of Jesus, Mary, His Mother" — not a word escaped her lips. Her silent fortitude only intensified her suffering, her self-possession allowed the grief to sink all the deeper. Mary stood by the Cross when His Apostles deserted Him. {Blessed} Cardinal Newman comments that she stood there, not wringing her hands and putting on a scene. She stood bolt upright to

receive the blows and stabs which the long passion of her Son inflicted upon her mother's heart. Mary stood by the Cross, nay, write some of the Fathers, she is fastened to the Cross with Him.

"There stood by the Cross of Jesus, Mary His Mother." From that hour, she became our Mother and our model in whose company and following whose example we hope to stand more worthily by the Cross of Jesus.

Wonderful is Mary in her Immaculate Conception. Beautiful is she as the fairest daughter of God the Father. Resplendent is she as the spouse of the Holy Spirit. But nearer and dearer to us is Mary our sorrowful Mother, standing beneath the Cross with her eyes sad and tears on her cheeks.

Jesus knew what sufferings Mary was enduring beside His Cross. Gently, kindly, softly He spoke to her: "Woman, behold your son." Then to Saint John: "Behold your Mother." They both understood and from that hour the young apostle "took her unto his own" and into his own house where he cared for her as a loving son during the fifteen years she lived after Calvary. In that awful hour of sacrifice, Mary became our Mother. Spared the pains of child-birth at Bethlehem, she gave birth to us with the agony of Calvary. At Bethlehem, she became the Mother of God and on Calvary, she became the Mother of men. She brought forth the Innocent without pain, but she could not bring forth sinners without sorrow. Her title of Mother of men became hers by the right of birth. Thirty years with the Redeemer had taught her that she must love men as He loved them — enough to suffer and die for them, and still live on.

PRAYER:

We are often wayward children, O Mother, but we love you for you were His dying gift to us. We ask you, Mother dear, to stand by us. May we see the value of suffering for our eternal salvation. Assist us then to bear meekly and with resignation all our crosses, and through them may we have you beside us now and at the hour of our death.

Mary, in your fourth dolour, you did show us how we are to carry our cross, and in this, the fifth dolour, you do show us how to stand by it. Your Son has told us that only those who persevere to the end will be saved. But perseverance is sometimes so difficult.

Beg for us the grace that like you we may stand by the Cross until the end as you did stand on Calvary for three full hours. There your sorrow was so deep that even the greatest of martyrs have saluted you as their Queen. Because of that martyrdom, pray for us that when the lease of our life has ended, we can say like your Divine Son:

"I have finished the work." Now, God, take me down, and lift me up into everlasting union with You.

SIXTH SORROW: JESUS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS.

"Joseph of Arimathea, a noble counsellor, came and went in boldly to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. And Joseph buying fine linen, and taking Him down, wrapped Him up in the fine linen." — Mark 15:43-46.

MEDITATION:

The Passion is over for Jesus: He is dead. The Centurion came up beside Mary and drove his lance into the warm, dead body. Jesus did not feel that, but Mary did. The piercing of the Sacred Heart

was a sacrilege to her and she was terribly hurt. To open His Sacred Side in death was the final desecration of that holy Body.

The crowd has gone, their blood lust satisfied. The earthquake sent them hurrying back to their homes in terror. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus take the Body down from the Cross, and with much reverence lay It on Mary's knee. No word is spoken as Mary contemplates the broken Body of her Son. Mother-like she goes back to Bethlehem where thirty-three years ago she first held Him in her arms. A stable for Him then, and now look at Him! The handsome Boy, the manly Youth, the noble Man is reduced to this by the sins of men.

But sorrow-stricken though she is, there is no self-pity, and with calm fortitude, she listens to the funeral arrangements made by her friends. Joseph of Arimathea has Pilate's permission to bury the Body in his new sepulchre. Nicodemus brings "a mixture of myrrh and aloes about a hundred pounds weight" to anoint the Body. What a sad, moving scene is that in the waning daylight on Calvary! The little group preparing the dead Body for the tomb! Few words are spoken, and these in whispers. They all help, but the loving hands that bathed the Babe in Bethlehem do the last reverences for His burial on Calvary. She removes the crown of thorns. Jesus could not be hurt now, yet tenderly Mary loosens the blood clotted hair and extracts the thorns from the cruelly wounded Head. The eyes of Jesus, still open and fixed in that appeal to His Father, she gently closes. She anoints the wounds in His Hands and Feet with a mixture of myrrh and aloes. They turn the Body for her and she sees for the first time what He had suffered from the scourges. She does not wash the Blood from off His Body. It is too precious.

The loyal Mary Magdalene, who had anointed Him six days ago in Bethany, had the privilege of mixing the myrrh and spices, aloes and perfume which the wealthy Nicodemus had brought. The mother kisses the wounds on the Body and Head of her Son, and the little band reverently follow her example. The body is anointed and ready for the winding sheet. There is a pause as Mary takes a long, loving glance at the Body while in her soul she goes again through the Passion of her Son. Mothers live on last looks, and Mary must now take hers. As she looked, the sun setting in the west threw on the hill the lengthening shadow of the Cross, as sorrow was now throwing its lengthening cross upon the heart of the Mother of God.

She spreads the fine linen, the gift of Nicodemus, and drapes it around His Body. She fastens the linen bands. With one last farewell tearful kiss, she covers the face with the head cloth and ties the knot under the chin. Sorrow's sword is in her heart.

PRAYER:

O sorrowful Mother Mary, illuminate our minds that we may often see that scene in all its harrowing detail! Saint John, the beloved Apostle, share with us the sorrow that was yours on that evening. Saint Mary Magdalene, you who were so honoured and whose sins were forgiven because you had loved Him so much, teach us to love Him as the best reparation for our sins.

Grant, dear Mother, that our hearts may be pierced with the same sword of sorrow that pierced your soul, and that we may sorrow unto tears for the part our sins played in this terrible sixth dolour.

SEVENTH SORROW: JESUS IS PLACED IN THE TOMB.

"Now there was in the place where He was crucified, a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein no man yet had been laid. There, therefore, because of the day of Preparation of the Jews, they laid Jesus; because the sepulchre was nigh at hand." — John 19:41-42.

MEDITATION:

The sun is sinking behind the Judean hills. The small group of mourners are silent, no one to disturb them, for Jerusalem has forgotten them, and those who have crucified Him are now refreshing themselves after this nerve-trying day. At a sign from Mary the three men, Saint John, Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea, lift the Body and carry It the short way to the tomb. Mary with the loving escort of women friends form the funeral procession. There are no wreaths except the crown of thorns, and the nails.

This is the terrible time for a woman's loving heart. Men can only stand by, mute and sympathetic. Instinct tells them to leave the women alone, for no one can help them. How overpowering is that final act for Mary! Salome, the mother of Saint John, as she looks at her own young manly son carrying the Body might guess something of 'what is in Mary's heart', but it is Mary Magdalene who comes nearest to Mary's sorrow for of the Magdalene He said: "Many sins are forgiven her because she had loved much."

The Magdalene first met Jesus that afternoon in Naim when He raised the dead man to life, and gave him back to his widowed mother. That same day she knelt at His feet, and heard His comforting words as He raised her from sin to the new life of grace. She had been the friend of Jesus and Mary since. She had seen Jesus weep by the tomb of her brother Lazarus, and out of His love for her had called Lazarus back from death.

Jesus now was dead; dead Himself, and there was no one to comfort His Mother. She watches Mary, so calmly entering the sepulchre to see that all things were done with care and respect. Magdalene remembered her many sins. Jesus had forgiven them all, and had brought her to His own Immaculate Mother, and there began the only true friendship of her life. As she looked on the sad but resigned face of Mary, she learned what a price had been paid for sin and for her forgiveness. She knelt down by the sepulchre and wept.

The rolling of the stone in front of the sepulchre had not the hollow, hopeless sound of earth falling on a coffin. To Mary, His Mother, who knew that the Resurrection would follow the Death, it was no more than the gentle closing of the Tabernacle door, which Mary knew would open again. Mary's sorrow was not for her dead Son now but for sin and sinners who had crucified Him.

Mary supported by the strong young arms of John, assisted by his mother, Salome, and her own sister, Mary of Cleophas, begins the return way of the Cross. The light of a Paschal moon sheds its rays across her path. How grim and clear the crosses stand on Calvary's hill! She goes up to His Cross, still bearing stains of His Blood. She kneels and kisses the Cross with reverence and retraces her morning pilgrimage, making for the second time the way of the Cross, from the fourteenth station to the first. This time it seems more terrible than the first, because she makes it without Him.

Most probably, she accepted the invitation of the Magdalene and returned to Bethany where a warm welcome would be hers from Martha and Lazarus.

Mary lived for fifteen years after the Crucifixion. Saint John is her son now and his home became her home. But the word "home" had lost its significance, for what could home mean without Jesus? She had to suffer with Him, and then for fifteen long years to live without Him. Death had ended suffering for Jesus, but not for her. Now she was more to be pitied than Jesus. Gladly would she have died with Him, but no, she must live on with the empty loneliness in her heart.

Simeon's sword of sorrow is buried to the hilt in her heart: there is no room for more.

PRAYER:

O Mary Mother, as we contemplate your desolation and noble resignation at the burial of your crucified Son, we admit that it was sin, our sins included, that was the cause of it all. We indeed are sorry for our part and we resolve to bury in the tomb with Jesus all our evil inclination and desires.

We promise to go often to the Passion of your Son, and to enter into your own sorrows, for we believe that the way of the Cross is the way of the Mother, and that there is no other way to him and to you.

Saint Mary Magdalene, lead us to see in the light streaming from the Cross how much sin hurts Him, and how willingly pardons the loving heart.

Saint John, the beloved, come with us to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and warm our hearts to offer ourselves, our trials and sorrows, our resolutions and promises, our confidence and trust to Him and in Him and with Him.

O strong and loving Mother of men, assist us in our temptations and weakness of will that we may never sin again. Pray for us now, and at the hour of our death, so that we may be admitted into your presence, there to thank you, and with Jesus, your Son and our Redeemer, to live for ever in Heaven.

“Mary, Mother of Sorrows, your heart is everything to us; it is a living altar stone on which the sacrifice is offered; it is the sanctuary lamp whose flame leaps with joy before its God; it is the server for its beatings are like the responses of the liturgy; it is the Pascal candle which lights the sanctuary of our souls by the sacrifice of self; it is the thurible which gives the sweet odour of incense as it burns in love for us; it is a whole angelic choir singing voiceless songs into ravished ears of the bleeding Host, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Mary, sacristan of souls, as you were the sacristan of Jesus, a good life is worth nothing if it be not crowned with a happy death. We shall spend our whole life therefore asking this of you, if it be only to gain it at the end. Your Divine Son said He would not leave us orphans. But Mary, we will be orphans unless you are our mother.”

Bishop Fulton Sheen

APPENDIX.

Method of Saying the Dolour Rosary.

The only requisite for saying the Seven Dolour Rosary, and for gaining the Indulgences, is to meditate upon each of the Seven Dolours in turn while saying an Our Father on each medal and a Hail Mary on each bead. The entire essential, therefore, consists of: 7 Meditations, 7 Our Fathers, 49 Hail Marys. No more than that is required to gain Indulgences.

SEVEN DOLOUR ROSARY INDULGENCES.

His Holiness Pope Pius XII, with a Rescript of the Sacred Penitentiary Apostolic dated March 28th, 1942, abrogated all the Indulgences granted by former Sovereign Pontiffs for the recitation of the Seven Dolour Rosary, and granted the following Indulgences to those who recite the Seven Dolour Rosary:

Plenary Indulgences:

1. Those who recite the Rosary daily, not including Sundays, may gain a plenary indulgence once a month.
2. Plenary Indulgence on the two Feasts of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Mother. (September 15 and the Friday before Good Friday.)
3. On each Friday of the year when the Rosary is recited for the souls in Purgatory.
4. On each Thursday of the year when the Rosary is said in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. To gain this Plenary Indulgence it is not necessary that the Blessed Sacrament be exposed.
5. Pope Pius XII, with a Rescript of the Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary dated April 2nd, 1951, extended to Servite Tertiaries and to all the faithful enrolled in the Confraternity of Our Lady of Sorrows, the Plenary Indulgence toties quoties (as often as it shall happen) granted to Servite Fathers, Brothers, and Nuns who recite the Seven Dolour Rosary before the Blessed Sacrament — either solemnly exposed or enclosed in the Tabernacle.
6. With a Rescript of the Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary, dated December 19th, 1953, Pope Pius XII granted a plenary indulgence once a day to all the faithful who after Confession and Holy Communion recite the Rosary before the Blessed Sacrament — either solemnly exposed or enclosed in the Tabernacle.

Partial Indulgences:

1. Seven years for each complete recitation of the Rosary.
2. 100 days for each Our Father and the same for each Hail Mary, to those who recite the whole Rosary.
3. Two hundred days (200) for each Our Father and the same for each Hail Mary to those who recite the whole Rosary on the two Feasts of the Seven Dolours of the Blessed Virgin Mary, during the Octaves of these Feasts, during Lent, or on any Friday of the year.
4. Those who recite the Rosary frequently may gain an indulgence of ten years when they assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass or are present for a sermon, or when they accompany the Blessed Sacrament when It is carried to the sick, or whenever they perform some work of mercy, spiritual or temporal, in honour of the Passion of Our Lord or the Sorrows of His Blessed Mother.

[Since the reforms of Vatican II, indulgences are now classified under two categories only: Plenary Indulgences and Partial Indulgences. It is wise to recall that God is never outdone in generosity and mercy.]
