

## Behold Your Mother

At the end of the journey of the Seven Sorrows of Mary, Saint John says: 'The disciple made a place for her in his home' (John 19:28). But that is not the end of the story. We know from the Acts of the Apostles that, on Pentecost Sunday when the apostles gathered together in prayer, they did so with Mary, the Mother of Jesus (Acts 1:14). Mary, who had stood at the foot of the Cross, was there with the apostles as they prayed before the coming of the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit whom Jesus had sent forth on Calvary: 'Bowing his head, he handed over the Spirit' (John 19:30). Jesus handed over the Spirit on Calvary, from the Cross, and that same Spirit came down on the apostles gathered in prayer with Mary the Mother of Jesus. She is there at the moment of her Son's death and she is there at the moment of Pentecost. She is present as the Mother of Jesus on Calvary and she is present at Pentecost as the Mother of the Church. This is the meaning of the words Jesus speaks on the Cross when he says to Mary 'Woman, behold your son' and to the Beloved Disciple 'Behold your mother' (John 19:27-28). And it is then that the disciple takes her to his home.

When Saint John speaks of the Beloved Disciple,

we believe that he is talking about himself but we need to remember that, for John, the meaning of the Beloved Disciple is much more than just a reference to himself. When he refers in the Gospel to the Beloved Disciple, John is telling us how to be a good disciple; he is saying 'If you want to live as



a disciple of Jesus, this is how to live'. The Beloved Disciple in that sense symbolises the Church; and each of us, to be fully alive in the Church, is called to live as the Beloved Disciple: to welcome Mary into our home, to welcome her into our heart and into our life. This means to hear the words of Jesus 'This is your Mother', realising that when Jesus said to Mary 'This is your son, this is your daughter', he was referring to each of us as a Beloved Disciple of the Lord.

What happens to Our Blessed Lady after this? She is there in

the heart of the Church, reminding the Church of what it is meant to be, reminding each of us of what it means to live as a Christian. Above all, Mary reminds us that being a Christian is not just about an idea. Often today, people present Christianity as a good way of life, with lots of good notions in it which will help you to live your life well. But Mary is there to remind us that at the heart of Christian-

ity is a relationship. Jesus says to her ‘There is your son, there is your daughter’, and he says to us ‘There is your mother’ to remind us of that relationship. The presence of Mary in the Church is a guarantee that the following of Christ is not just an idea, but that at the heart of the Church is a relationship.

And what does Mary herself do after these seven sorrows? Saint Francis de Sales, in his book *The Treatise on the Love of God*, says that Mary took all the sufferings of Jesus and all the pain of her own sorrow and she treasured them in her heart. Do you remember that place in the Gospel where it says ‘As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart’? When we think of that, we naturally think of the words of Jesus, but Francis de Sales reminds us that Mary treasures also in her heart the sufferings of Jesus, and indeed her own sorrows, and that she carries these in her heart. Why does she do this? She does this because it is her role in the Church: she is the one who teaches us how to remember the Passion of Christ, and teaches us that this is an essential part of being a disciple of Jesus: to treasure in our heart not just the joy of following him but also the pain: the sufferings of Christ and the sorrows of Mary.

Do you remember the third of the Seven Sorrows of Mary? After three days spent searching for the child, Mary and Joseph found him in the Temple. When they spoke to him and said ‘We’ve been looking for you for days; we’ve been searching for you everywhere’, he said ‘Do you not know



I must be about my Father’s business?’ Saint Luke says: ‘But they did not understand what he meant ... And Mary pondered these words’ (Luke 2: 50–51). Mary’s pondering, her carrying of all this in her heart, brought her into the light of understanding. And on Calvary at the foot of the Cross, when Jesus said these words to her ‘Woman, behold your son’, meaning the Beloved Disciple who is each of us, Mary received the grace of understanding. She understood what is ‘his Father’s business’, and she treasured not just the words of Jesus but the pain and suffering of Jesus in her heart. And it is Mary, the Mother of the Church, the Mother of Sorrows, who teaches us about the meaning of the mystery of suffering.

How do we come to understand the meaning of suffering? We don’t do it by thinking about it or by reading books about it, but we come to understand the mystery of suffering in union with Mary, carrying in our heart the sufferings of Jesus, allowing the pain of Christ to penetrate deeply into our own heart. Mary is the one who teaches us this. And what is the secret of suffering that Mary understands on Calvary? What is the secret of suffering that she wishes to share with each one of us? It is a secret so strange that we find it, many times in our life, difficult to grasp or even to face. It is the presence of love in suffering. Why does Mary treasure the sufferings of Jesus? Why does she carry in her heart the memory of the Passion of Jesus? Because she has come to understand that this is indeed the revealing of God’s love, and the truth of the love of God is revealed fully on the Cross.

And so for ourselves in our own life, when we struggle in life with the things that we cannot understand; we won’t come to understanding by thinking about it or by reading or even by simply talking about it. We will come to understanding by allowing our pain to be felt in the presence of Jesus and of his love. We do this through prayer and silence, allowing our own pain to be immersed in the pains and sufferings of Jesus. This is what Mary learned at the foot of the Cross, and this is what she seeks to share with each one of us. We can ask for the grace to be like her, to treasure all of this in our hearts, carrying in our hearts the remembrance of the pain and the suffering of Jesus, and, through that, to come to some deep awareness of the love of God revealed on



the Cross, a love that seeks to reach into our own pain, into those places where words cannot go, so that God himself, Jesus himself who gave his life for us, can truly enter into our heart as he entered into the heart of Mary.

When the Gospel says 'the disciple took her to his own home', it is saying that the disciple, you and me, has to find a place for the kind of heart that Mary has: a heart which has a space for Christ. There are things which happen to us that we find difficult to understand; there are pains that we endure in life which are beyond words; but we can ask, through our contemplation of the suffering of Jesus, for the grace to have his love also present in our hearts.

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## PASSIONIST SYMBOLS



### Black and White

*When I came to a street corner to turn towards home, I was raised up in God in the deepest recollection, with complete forgetfulness of all else and with great interior peace. At that moment I saw myself clothed in a long black garment with a white cross on my breast,*

*and below the cross the holy name of Jesus was written in white letters. At that instant I heard these very words spoken to me: 'This signifies how pure and spotless that heart should be which must bear the holy name of Jesus graven upon it'.*

That Saint Paul of the Cross was acquainted with the symbolism of colours is clear from a letter written by him. Here, he gives an interpretation of the liturgical colours which is aimed at encouraging his reader to be constant in prayer and the practice of the virtues:

*In the whiteness of the vestments, linen and other things, you can reflect on the innocence of Jesus Christ or the purity with which the vestments are to be treated, cared for and made use of. Finally, the colour black signifies the mourning and affliction of life, seeing ourselves in the midst of so many dangers and far from heaven, which is our true home, and from always loving and rejoicing in the Supreme Good.*

For Paul, black is primarily a symbol of death; the one who wears black does so as a sign that he has died to sin, and also as a reminder of the death of Jesus, on which his own dying life is modelled. In the fragment of the first Rule, written at Castellazzo in 1720, we read:

*And furthermore, dearly beloved, you must know that the main object in wearing black ... is to be clothed in mourning for the Passion and Death of Jesus. For this purpose let us never forget to have always with us a constant and sorrowful remembrance of him.*

We find an interpretation of the white colour of the cross and the name of Jesus in the words heard by Paul: 'This signifies how pure and spotless that heart should be which must bear the holy name of Jesus graven upon it'. Just as the black signifies conversion of heart through renunciation and death to self in union with Jesus Crucified, so the white is for Paul a symbol of that purity of heart which is brought about by our sharing in the Risen Life of Jesus.

The one who wears the habit is clothed in mourning in memory of the Passion and death of Jesus; but his wearing of the habit also symbolises his own participation in the Paschal Mystery and his desire to know Christ 'and the power of his resurrection, and to share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death'.

## PASSIONIST SAINTS



OCTOBER 19

SAINT PAUL OF THE CROSS

Born in 1694, Saint Paul of the Cross wrote the Rule of the Passionists when he was 26 years old, after a series of inspirations and visions. Saint Paul's community dedicated itself to preaching the mystery of the love of God which is revealed in the Passion of Jesus. He died at Rome in 1775.

### A Prayer of Saint Paul of the Cross

*Most Holy Redeemer, imprint your sacred Passion on my heart! Mary most holy, give Jesus to me, let me hold him close to my heart. Imprint your great sorrows on my heart, let me love Jesus with your most pure Heart.*

### Mary in the Letters of Saint Paul of the Cross

Above all I recommend interior solitude, and I pray you to fly in spirit to the dear Heart of Jesus. Once there, lock yourself inside with the gold key of God's love, placing that precious key on the most pure Heart of Mary most holy, Mother of Sorrows.

*Lettere I, 477*

Let us fly to the most pure heart of Mary ... asking the grace to remain always immersed in the immense sea of God's love, from which flows that other sea of the sufferings of Jesus and the sorrows of Mary; let us allow ourselves to be penetrated by these sufferings, these sorrows; and let us allow the sword or lance or dart to be well tempered, so that the wound of love may penetrate more deeply.

*Lettere I, 349*

The great wound of love with which her pure heart was sweetly pierced, from the first moment of her Immaculate Conception, increased to such an extent during the course of her life that it penetrated so deeply within her as to separate her holy

soul from her body. So it was that this death of love, sweeter than life itself, put an end to the great sea of sorrow which that Mother endured throughout her most holy life, not only in the Sacred Passion of Jesus, but in seeing so many offences against the Divine Majesty committed by ungrateful men.

*Lettere I, 349*

## MOTHER OF SORROWS

VICTOR HOAGLAND CP

*As Eve was a conspirator with Adam at the fall, so God wished Mary to be the companion of Jesus at the restoration. God inspired this great woman to set out for Calvary not to be a spectator, but a partner in the sacrifice of her Son.*

Blessed Dominic Barberi

We know Jesus because we are brought to him by others. Could we know his Passion, for example, without the great stories of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? Without Paul the Apostle, or Moses and the prophets? Without the liturgy of the Church, the wisdom and reflection of generations of saints, mystics, preachers, theologians, writers, scholars, artists and poets, as well as multitudes of ordinary Christians?

Yet among all of these one is unique – Mary, his mother. She knew Jesus from birth to death and resurrection and she knew him in a special way, as mother. She wrote nothing down – no words, no recollections are directly attributable to her – but the Church does not think of her as a writer of recollections. Rather Mary is a living presence among us, who communicates a holy wisdom. She is a guide to those who walk by faith; an agent of the Holy Spirit, who helps us to know the mysteries of Christ.

She was there when they crucified him. A few simple sentences of the Gospel describe her role: 'There was standing by the Cross of Jesus, Mary, his mother'. Long before that moment she had learned to walk by faith, to wait, to trust, to believe. Then, as she stood there watching her Son die, Mary was tested as never before. And she did not falter.

The mysterious words of Jesus – 'Behold your mother' – are meant for us, as well as for the disciple who stood watching with her. When the mystery of the Cross falls on us, Mary has been promised to us. She will be at our side, a brave companion who knows how to stand in the dark time of Calvary and wait for the light.

Father Victor Hoagland CP, *Following Jesus Christ*, 2000. <<http://www.cptryon.org/xpipassio/medit/mary.html>>