

Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows – September 15, 2017 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 6:30pm Mass w/ Consecration Renewal – 1,110 words

With all of the blessings that Our Lady has obtained from her Son for us over these past five years since Father Bazzel led the parish in consecration to her Immaculate Heart, it is right and just for us to be here to give thanks and renew that consecration tonight; I thank you all for coming! And we include in this evening's devotion all those parishioners who are not here for any reason; we remember those who have died in these past five years and commend them to our Blessed Mother's care; and we recognize that the Lord already knows who will pass through our doors and join our parish in the future, and we include them in the consecration as well. Finally, I welcome those who may not regularly attend this parish but wish nevertheless to share in this special blessing!

One of the most famous verses from the Book of Lamentations, which has perhaps captured the imagination of artists and musicians the most, is from the first chapter, verse 12: "Behold, and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow...". This Old Testament verse is often and correctly seen as applying to our Lord in his Passion: he is the Man of Sorrows, who bears the weight of the sins of every human being in his heart and on his shoulders as he goes to his Cross. But in our Catholic spiritual tradition, this verse is often applied to our Blessed Mother as well, who stood at the foot of the cross in unspeakable sorrow. "Behold, and see, if there be any sorrow like unto [her] sorrow"! Saints and scholars have referred to her as "more than a martyr" because of what she suffered, for she was no mere spectator, but shared intensely in her Son's offering to the eternal Father.

Though suffering often catches us by surprise, Our Lady was not surprised by hers; she remembered – and had pondered over in her heart many times – the prophecy of Simeon when she had presented baby Jesus in the temple; we heard it in the gospel this evening: "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...". As she, from that point on, came to understand more fully how her Son would save us all by accepting the penalty for our sins, she also began to understand that she would have an active role to play in that. Therefore, some years later, at the wedding feast at Cana, she opened the way to Christ's Passion by prompting him to perform his first miracle: "They have no wine", she said; and he responded with those puzzling words, "Woman, what is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." Jesus was effectively saying: "If I give in to your request, this opens the door to my suffering and to yours". But hear her response: "Do whatever he tells you"; in other words, she said "yes".

And so it was that as Our Lady stood beneath the Cross of her Son, she was continuing to say yes; the sword of sorrow pierced her heart as she experienced the pain of seeing her Son suffer – which is difficult for any mother to bear – but not only; her intense sorrow also came from the fact of her sharing in a profound way with her Son's sacrifice. I preached a couple of weeks ago about how we must offer ourselves to God in holy Mass: especially at the moment of the offertory, when the gifts are brought forward to the altar and the priest begins the offertory prayers, we should place ourselves and all that we wish to offer to God there spiritually upon the altar as well. For the greatest way that we can worship our heavenly Father is not through external praise but through interior sacrifice: giving ourselves entirely to him. As her Son endured his Passion, Mary stood by his Cross in com-passion, sharing intensely in his sacrifice by uniting herself perfectly to it.

"Behold, and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow". Sometimes we feel that this verse is our own. In those difficult moments – which, we must hasten to add, are never as severe as what our Lord and his Mother experienced – we may feel like we have reached our

limit. And our temptation is often to flee from the pain. But hear the words of the Sequence that our choir so beautifully chanted this evening: “O thou mother, font of love! Touch my spirit from above, make my heart with thine accord! Make me feel as thou hast felt; make my soul to glow and melt with the love of Christ my Lord!” That is only a brief excerpt of a hymn which really dwells quite heavily on uniting our sorrows and crosses with our sorrowful Mother at the foot of her Son’s Cross. Instead of seeking to escape our pain and the trials of life, we do well to bring them to the Cross and offer them for our own sins and for poor sinners everywhere.

By renewing our consecration this evening – or, for some, it may be the first time you are making it – we seek our Blessed Mother’s powerful help in carrying the crosses of our life. We know that we cannot be saved unless we take up our crosses and follow after Christ. Our Lady is the perfect model for us in that task, for she not only took up the cross in her life but she consented to it and shared in it perfectly: she never resisted, she never fled, she never started but then turned back. And although that might make her seem so distant from us, much to the contrary, we know that she is always very near. It brings us such happiness to show her our love and honor, and we know that her one goal is to help us serve her Son more faithfully: she so desires for us to win our race and obtain the prize.

This evening, we ask her to help us internalize in a profound way the gift of consecration, so that the love and honor we show her is not only with our lips or even in our emotions, but is most deeply reflected in our lives, lived for the glory of God. To our dear Mother this evening, we say: thank you. Thank you for watching over our parish! Thank you for taking us under your mantle! Thank you for being always near! Amen.