

Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows – September 15, 2018 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham – 8:30am Mass concluding Vigil of Adoration – 925 words

Imagine what it might be like to go to the church – to the priest – with your newborn child, for baptism. And in that moment of otherwise great joy, the priest looked you in the eye and said: “This child will leave the Church when she goes to college and break your heart because of it. She will eventually come back. And you yourself will die a painful death from cancer.” Imagine the sorrow such news would bring – and how you would carry that sorrow with you each day going forward. How exactly would she drift away from the faith? But isn’t there some way I could prevent it? But what will she do during that time – will she live a sinful lifestyle? And me? A painful death? But when? Surely there will be a cure by then?... The sorrow of this foreknowledge could truly be a great torment.

“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...” Simeon’s prophecy to Our Lady brought with it a burden of sorrow that she would carry from that day forward. Earlier, the angel had told her that her son would be “great”, the “son of the Most High”, and that “of his kingdom there [would] be no end”. Now the elderly priest tells her of falling and rising, contradiction, and a piercing sword. How would all of this come about? When would it happen? How would God fulfill the word of the angel? Oh, our Blessed Mother did not doubt. But she was not an unfeeling robot, either. Simeon’s word was not one of comfort; much to the contrary. His word brought her a burden of sorrow that she carried from that day forward.

When we consider the weight of sorrow Mary pondered in her heart over her son’s 33 years, we see just how dramatic certain moments in her life truly were. When she and Joseph lost the child Jesus and found him in the temple – in his “Father’s house” – perhaps she wondered: could it really be beginning already? But he was obedient and went home with them; no, not now, not yet – but when? Later, when they were at the wedding feast at Cana – perhaps Joseph had already gone to God by that point – and she asked her son for the miracle to save the couple from embarrassment, he responded in a way to indicate that her request would start the process that Simeon had foretold. She understood that well; yet, she did not shy away from the inevitable pain. No, “do whatever he tells you”, she said; she consented to the sorrow.

But her sorrow was not without hope, either. Again, there were the prophecies of the angel – and her strong faith that God would keep his promises. There was the knowledge that her son was indeed the Savior. There was the knowledge that he was no mere human being, but also divine. In short, we can say that her sorrow was not “unto death”, but “unto life”: it was acute but not terminal; it would give way to unspeakable joy; it would be worth every bit of it. And because her burden was tied up with the entire drama of salvation – the “fall and rise of many” – it in some way implicated us all, as well. The pains and trials of our own lives are somehow hidden in Our Lady’s sorrows and carried in her heart. She is there with us in our every difficulty, no matter how great or small, and can always sympathize – and help.

Indeed, today our hearts go out to the victims of sexual predation in the Church, as we offer this Mass for their healing and consolation. Theirs is an unspeakable sorrow, a burden that most of us cannot even begin to imagine, and one that, for them, must often seem entirely without hope. But Our Lady can help. She understands. She has borne their pain. She knew Judas Iscariot; she had high hopes for him; but then she saw what he did to her son. She saw Jesus scourged and crowned with thorns. She stood beneath his cross. She watched as the soldier pierced his side with a lance. But she also saw him after his resurrection. And he has wiped away every tear from her face. We ask her today – and throughout this season of great sorrow in her son’s Church – to obtain for the victims graces of healing and consolation.

And our own hearts are touched with sorrow as well. All of this pains us greatly. There is a sense, at times, that the bad news is only beginning. Moreover, we wonder how – and when – it will all end. How will the Church move past this? Will victims find healing and hope? Like the disciples in the boat with Jesus amidst the storm on the sea, all we can do is cry out: “Save us, Lord”. And he will. His mother will help. God does not ordinarily reveal to us all the pain and sorrow our futures will hold, like in the scenario we imagined at the beginning. But he did do that for his own mother, and he has given her to us to care for and comfort us, whenever we do come face-to-face with the pains and trials of life. In this difficult time we turn to her, who has borne our sorrows also. Blessed Mother, Our Lady of Sorrows: pray for us.

Spanish Homily – 250 words

Gracias por venir a esta Misa, que ofrezco por las víctimas de depredación sexual en la Iglesia. Hoy es la memoria de la Virgen de los Dolores, buen día para recordar a las víctimas y ofrecer su dolor al Señor, por intercesión de nuestra Santísima Madre. Ella entiende bien su dolor – un dolor verdaderamente inefable – y sabe cómo, de buena madre, ayudarles en este momento tan difícil. Ella también carga en su corazón un dolor particular por los delitos y pecados que sacerdotes y obispos han cometido al realizar tal depredación. Son cosas diabólicas que jamás debían de suceder. Pero sí, por gran desgracia, sucedieron – y ella, Virgen de los Dolores, ahora nos acompaña a todos en lo que es un período muy penoso y pesado.

Le damos las gracias al padre Jaime de Corpus Christi en Oneonta, por haber dirigido una vigilia de adoración tan bella desde anoche. Sabemos que el buen Dios dará muchas gracias de sanación a las víctimas y purificación a la Iglesia a través de tal iniciativa. Y era bueno que pudiéramos realizarla en estas fiestas tan tempestivas de la Exaltación de la Santa Cruz y de la Virgen de los Dolores. La Santa Cruz es nuestra salvación, y debajo de ella encontramos a nuestra Santísima Madre – virgen fiel, virgen poderosa – que aguanta sus dolores con gran valentía y fortaleza. En este momento, como Iglesia, estamos abajo de la Cruz, también: pedimos a ella su intercesión y acompañamiento. Virgen de los Dolores, ruega por nosotros.