

*Mary, the heart of the Mystical Body*  
*The Seven Sorrows Rosary, Week 4*  
*Mary meets Jesus on the Way of the Cross*

A long period of time transpires between the scene in last week's reflection, the finding of Jesus in the Temple, and this week's. Suddenly we find ourselves in Holy Week. Scripture does not mention Mary's presence along the Way of the Cross, but the traditional Stations of the Cross commemorate the encounter between Jesus and his mother as the fourth Station. Here is what St. Matthew tells us about the Way of the Cross and the events preceding it (27:27-32): "Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus inside the praetorium and gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped off his clothes and threw a scarlet military cloak about him. Weaving a crown out of thorns, they placed it on his head, and a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' They spat upon him and took the reed and kept striking him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the cloak, dressed him in his own clothes, and led him off to crucify him. As they were going out, they met a Cyrenian named Simon; this man they pressed into service to carry his cross."

For me, the encounter between Mary and Jesus on the Way of the Cross is all about Mary's compassion, which means, literally, to suffer with. It is also about her sheer grit and unwavering courage. Jesus knew that his mother loved him and that she had followed him to Jerusalem. He didn't need Mary to accompany him all the way to Golgotha; after all, she couldn't change the course of events. Mary could have stayed out of view, in a safe place, praying and grieving for her Son. But that wasn't Mary's way. She was going to follow him to the end.



In Mary there were two seemingly contradictory agonies — on the one hand, the longing to save her Son from his unbearable suffering; and on the other, the desire to help him finish the work that the Father had given him to do. We know which one prevailed. Mary willed herself to follow Jesus all the way to Golgotha so that she could give him to the world on the Cross, just as she had given him to the world in the stable. Mary's human, maternal love, remained conformed to the will of God. Her personal agony did not paralyze her soul because there was nothing selfish about it. Just as she accompanied Jesus and suffered with him, she stands close by those who suffer in every place and every time.

The Synod Fathers recognized that young people suffer and need accompaniment. “The young, like everyone else, also carry wounds,” they wrote. “There are the wounds of the defeats they have suffered, frustrated desires, experiences of discrimination and injustice, of not feeling loved or recognized. There are physical and psychological wounds. Christ, who consented to endure his passion and death, comes close, through his cross, to all suffering young people.... Today more than ever, to be reconciled with one’s wounds is a necessary condition for a good life. The Church is called to support all the young in their trials and to promote whatever pastoral action may be needed.”



As older, more experienced members of the Church, we can offer young people this support. But what does this look like? A passage from Pope Francis’ letter on the Joy of the Gospel gives me a lot of inspiration. He said that the believing community should get involved in people’s lives, that it should bridge distances and be ready to abase itself if necessary. He said that believers should touch the suffering flesh of Christ in others. And he said an evangelizing community is supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be, without any regard for time constraints.

At World Youth Day Pope Francis reminded us that Jesus’ Way of the Cross continues today. The following is just an excerpt of a long prayer he offered, and I’ll end with this because I think it tells us how we should pray this week:

“Father, today your Son’s way of the cross





continues: it continues in the muffled cry of children kept from being born and of so many others denied the right to a childhood, a family, an education; of children not able to play, sing or dream... and in the saddened eyes of young people who see their hopes for the future snatched away for lack of education and dignified work;

It continues in the anguish of young faces, our friends, who fall into the snares of unscrupulous people – including people who claim to be serving you, Lord.... Your Son's way of the cross continues in those young people with downcast faces who have lost the ability to dream, create and shape their future, and have already chosen to "retire" in glum resignation or complacency, one of the narcotics most consumed in our time.

Your Son's passion continues in the despairing solitude of the elderly, whom we have discarded and abandoned.... It is prolonged in a society that has lost the ability to weep and to be moved by suffering. Yes, Father, Jesus keeps walking, carrying his cross and suffering in all these faces, while an uncaring world is caught up in comfortable cynicism and in the drama of its own frivolity.

And we, Lord, what are we to do? And we, Father of mercy, do we console and accompany the Lord, helpless and suffering in the poorest and most abandoned of our brothers and sisters? Do we help carry the burden of the cross, like Simon of Cyrene, by being peacemakers, builders of bridges, a leaven of fraternity? Do we have the courage to remain, like Mary, at the foot of the cross?"

These are good questions to ask ourselves and to share with young people this week.