

Homily 24th Sunday Yr B: Our Lady of Sorrows, Co-Redemptrix

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On September 14th and 15th, the Church celebrates two beautiful feasts: on the 14th, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, followed on the 15th by the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows.

At morning Mass this Saturday, Sept. 14, we celebrated this feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

In this feast the Church honors the Holy Cross on which our Savior, Jesus Christ, suffered and died.

This Sunday's readings tie in with this feast, because they foretell the future sufferings of Jesus:

In our first reading the Prophet Isaiah foretells the coming Savior, whom he calls a "suffering servant," and places these words on the lips of Jesus: "I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting."

Our Psalm today, 116, also foretells how Jesus would suffer for our salvation, and places these words on His lips: "The cords of death encompassed me; the snares of the netherworld seized me; I fell into distress and sorrow, and I called upon the name of the Lord, 'O Lord, save my life.'"

Here we can think of Jesus's cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!"

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks to His Apostles about His suffering and death: "The Son of Man must suffer greatly, be rejected by the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days."

We know that Jesus, after undergoing a brutal scourging and being crowned with thorns, died on the cross.

The true Cross of Christ was discovered by Saint Helena, the mother of the first Christian emperor, Constantine, in the early 4th century in Jerusalem.

This is why there exist today relics of the true Cross – tiny slivers of wood placed in a container called a reliquary.

I have two such relics, which I will make available for veneration at the end of today's Mass.

This Sunday is September 15, normally the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows; but because this feast is not a major one, a solemnity, we do not celebrate it on Sunday – we have the normal Sunday readings for the liturgical year.

But in light of the theme of today's readings – Christ's suffering and death – I'll speak about the meaning of this feast of Our Lady.

It's very appropriate that the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows follow the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, given that the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus, stood at the foot of the cross while her beloved Son, Jesus, was dying, and united her sufferings to those of her Son.

*The large painting on the back side wall to your left beautifully depicts this scene.

In fact, from the early centuries in the Church, practices of devotion to Our Lady's sorrows (e.g., her mental anguish) began; and by the later Middle Ages these became known as the Seven Sorrows of Mary – often related to Mary's Heart, because the first of the Seven Sorrows is the Presentation of the Baby Jesus in the Temple, when Simeon prophesied to Mary that “this child shall be a sword that will pierce your soul/heart.”

These Seven Sorrows of Mary came to be portrayed in works of art: See this week's bulletin.

Another of the Seven Sorrows is Mary standing at the foot of the Cross, uniting the suffering in her Heart to that of her crucified Son, which St. Bernard refers to as Mary's “martyrdom of heart.”

On Calvary, the Mother of God cooperated with her Son, Jesus, in redeeming us from our sins. In her love for Jesus, and for all of us, her spiritual children, she associated herself with her divine Son in the very act of our Redemption.

This is why numerous popes have given her the title, “Co-Redemptrix” – “co” meaning “with”: Mary, the sinless Virgin Mother, cooperated with her divine Son when He redeemed us, not on the same level, in an equal manner (we have only one Redeemer, Jesus), but, as numerous popes explain, in a secondary, subordinate manner.

For example, in a famous homily he delivered at a shrine of Our Lady in Ecuador back in 1985, Pope St. John Paul II said this:

“At Calvary [Mary] united herself with the sacrifice of her Son.... Her maternal heart shared to the very depths the will of Christ ‘to gather into one all the dispersed children of God’ (Jn. 11:52). Having suffered for the Church, Mary deserved to become the Mother of all the disciples of her Son.... In fact, Mary’s role as Co-redemptrix did not cease with the glorification of her Son.”

In another homily, in 1997, St. John Paul noted that St. Augustine “already gave the Blessed Virgin the title of ‘cooperator’ in the Redemption, a title [says Pope John Paul] which emphasizes Mary’s joint but subordinate action with Christ the Redeemer.”

Then Pope John Paul goes on to point out that, by reason of being joined to Christ through our baptism, we are all called to be co-redeemers with Jesus in the work of salvation and redemption; for as St. Paul says in 1 Cor. 3:9: “we are [all] God’s fellow workers.”

Yes, as baptized members of Christ’s Mystical Body, the Church, we can unite our prayers and sufferings – and everything we do – to Jesus crucified, for the salvation of souls. I can pray for you, you can pray for me; we can pray and make sacrifices for the conversion of sinners.

This “collaboration of believers,” says the Pope John Paul II, “obviously excludes any equality with [God].”

St. John Paul goes on to point that, “applied to Mary, the term ‘co-operator’ [or Co-Redemptrix] acquires a *specific* meaning. The collaboration of [all other] Christians in salvation takes place *after* the Calvary event, whose fruits

they endeavor to spread by prayer and sacrifice. Mary, instead, cooperated *during* the event itself and in the role of mother; thus her cooperation embraces the *whole* of Christ's saving work. *She alone* was associated in this way with the redemptive sacrifice that merited the salvation of *all* mankind. In union with Christ and in submission to Him, she collaborated in *obtaining* the grace of salvation for all humanity."

What is Pope St. John Paul II saying here? That by our prayers and sacrifices, we are co-redeemers in the sense that we cooperate with the **application** of the graces Christ merited on Calvary; but Mary is the Co-Redemptrix in a singular/unique sense, because she cooperated with Jesus in *obtaining* the graces He merited for our salvation.

Pope Benedict XVI, in a homily at a Mass at Fatima on May 13, 2010, encourages all of us, by uniting our sufferings with Jesus on the cross, to "assist in the salvation of your brethren." He emphasizes that by doing so, "*You will be redeemers with the Redeemer [Jesus], just as you are sons in the Son.*"

This is precisely what Jesus tells us in today's Gospel: "whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that the Gospel will save it."

When I was a boy and used to complain about something, the nuns, or my mother, would just tell me, "Offer it up." Yes, just offer it up, knowing that every difficulty, every form of suffering, every cross that we encounter in this life has been *planned, and willed by God from all eternity*, giving us the opportunity to unite ourselves with Jesus Christ on the Cross, not only for our own redemption and salvation, but for that of the whole world.

Mary, our spiritual Mother, also cooperates in this *application* of the graces which Christ merited, by her heavenly intercession. She is the Mediatrix of all the grace of Christ. Just consider the Morning Offering prayer: "*O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer you my prayers, works, joys and*

sufferings of this day, in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the throughout the world Mass (the daily re-presentation of Christ's Sacrifice on Calvary). I offer them for the intentions of your Sacred Heart: the salvation of souls, reparation for sin, for the reunion of all Christians..."

Let us always look to Our Lady of Sorrows as our model in offering up our prayers and sufferings with Jesus, and ask her powerful prayers as well in helping us to be co-redeemers with THE Redeemer, Jesus Christ.