



Mary, the heart of the Mystical Body
The Seven Sorrows Rosary, Week 5
Jesus Dies on the Cross

This week we reach the culmination of Christ's saving mission, his crucifixion and death. This is the fifth of Mary's seven sorrows. This week's key word is STANDING. St John tells us in his Gospel (19:25-30), "Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home. After this, aware that everything was now finished, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I thirst." There was a vessel filled with common wine. So they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth. When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, "It is finished." And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit."

As I mentioned, this week's key word is STANDING. Some artists portray Mary stooped over sobbing, or swooning in St John's arms at the foot of the Cross. But Scripture tells us that Mary STOOD there. Does her posture at that moment really matter? I think it does, or St. John wouldn't have mentioned it. Mary wasn't hysterical, crushed with sadness or turned in on herself as her Son hung there dying — she stood strong before Jesus crucified, as close as she could, in order to take it all in and to experience all his bodily sufferings with him — seeing them, contemplating them and loving them with a Mother's compassion.

How could she be so strong? Thinking about Mary standing at the foot of the Cross I am reminded of stories of parents who summon more courage and endurance than seems humanly possible to care for a child who is sick, injured or in trouble. This is a parent's unconditional, undying love, and Mary's love rose to a level infinitely higher than even the best of ordinary parents because she was full of grace and the Holy Spirit.

I'd like to quote one of our favorite authors, Jean Lafrance: "Standing near the Cross, Mary cruelly suffered with her only Son, associated with a motherly heart to his sacrifice, giving the consent of her love to the immolation of the victim born of her flesh. That is where her heart was really pierced as with a sword.... Her love was immeasurably great and we know that the one who



loves more suffers more. In her human nature the Mother of God could not have endured such a pain, but she surrendered herself to the will of God and, comforted by the Holy Spirit, she received the strength to bear her suffering...."

In his prayer after the Way of the Cross during World Youth Day Pope Francis also emphasized the significance of her **STANDING** before her crucified Son:

"Let us look to Mary, woman of strength. From her let us learn how to stand beneath the cross with her same determination and courage, without evasions or illusions. She accompanied the suffering of her Son ... she supported him by her gaze and protected him with her heart. She shared his suffering, yet was not overwhelmed by it. She was the woman of strength who uttered her 'yes,' who supports and accompanies, protects and embraces. She is the great guardian of hope.

We too, Father, want to be a Church that supports and accompanies, that is able to say, 'Here I am!' in the lives and amid the crosses of all those Christs who walk by our side....

From her we want to learn to stand beneath the cross, but not with hearts tightly shut, rather with hearts that can accompany, that feel tenderness and devotion, that show mercy and treat others with respect, sensitivity and understanding.... Father, like Mary we want to learn what it means to 'stand.'

Lord, teach us to stand, at the foot of the cross, at the foot of every cross. Open our eyes and hearts ... and rescue us from paralysis and uncertainty, from fear and from desperation. Father, teach us to say: Here I stand, alongside your Son, alongside Mary and alongside all those beloved disciples who desire to welcome your Kingdom into their heart. Amen"

Let's offer this prayer in the name of the young people we know.