

## To Suffer with Mary and Jesus

In 2017, the University of Pennsylvania came out with some research that indicated that those who empathize with those who are suffering **experience suffering in themselves**; they experience heightened an increase of the stress hormone, cortisol, in their blood stream despite not actually enduring the pain themselves.

Now if we combine **the power of empathy** with the **power of a mother's love** *in experiencing the suffering of her child*, how great would that suffering be! When her child experiences pain, she too feels it in her heart. When the child's hands and feet are pierced through with rough iron nails, she too feels the wounds in her hands and feet. When her child dies on a cross after hours of asphyxiation and suffocation, **it is as if the very breath in her heart has vanished away too**. But even more so, this mother has experienced a sword of sorrow that has pierced not only her body but even her soul.

Today we celebrate the memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows because we commemorate the mystery that Mary suffered intensely with Jesus.

Many of the saints call Mary the "Queen of Martyrs" which is interesting because she did not die by being killed for the faith as such, yet St. Alphonsus reaffirms this title of Mary due to the intensity and duration of her suffering.

Just as we have considered above, Mary entered intimately into Jesus' suffering through the power of empathy and through the power of a mother's heart so much so that she participated in the Passion of her Son in its intensity and in a unique way.

Saint Bernardine of Siena goes so far as to say, "that the grief of Mary was so great that, were it divided amongst all men, it would suffice to cause their immediate death"

The fathers of Vatican II expressed it in this way: "The Blessed Virgin...enduring with her only begotten Son **the intensity of his suffering, associated herself with his sacrifice in her mother's heart**, and LOVINGLY CONSENTING to the immolation of this victim which was born of her" (Lumen Gentium 58).

With regard to the duration of her suffering, Mary knew very early on that Jesus was going to die not only when Simeon pronounced that Jesus would be a sign that is to be contradicted, but even after giving birth to her Son. Barely a month into this joyous moment one of the wise men comes and gives her a jar of myrrh: an anointing oil used

to embalm a dead body. It would be equivalent to going to a baby shower and gifting the mother a coffin for her baby.

“Do not pity me only for the hour in which I beheld my dear Jesus expiring before my eyes; for the sword of sorrow predicted by Simeon pierced my soul during the whole of my life: when I was giving suck to my Son, when I was warming Him in my arms, I already foresaw the bitter death that awaited Him. Consider, then, what long and bitter sorrows I must have endured.” (St. Alphonsus Liguori)

Mary has suffered deeply and she can truly say with her Son:

Look and see  
if there is any sorrow like my sorrow  
    which was brought upon me,  
which the LORD inflicted  
    on the day of his fierce anger (Lam 1:12)

Do you experience suffering? Do you experience physical illness or suffering or exhaustion that does not seem to go away? Maybe you experience a nagging depression or confusion in your mind and in your soul and you feel like you are at your wits end? Or maybe you feel deep sorrow for a family member who has passed or who is nearing the end of their life?

When you can barely hold on anymore and you fall on your knees, cry out to our Blessed Mother! Say to her: “Blessed Mother I feel this pain in my heart and it feels like a sword in my soul. I feel like the wine of my life is fading away and it is running out; pray to Jesus for me that he may transform the bitter water of my suffering into the wine of salvation. I do not know how to suffer; so show me how to suffer because when I suffer with you I suffer with Jesus for the spear that pierced his Most Sacred Heart also pierced your Immaculate Heart too. I do not know how to unite my sufferings with Christ so unite my bleeding heart with yours so that this suffering may not lead to my despair but hope in the Resurrection. Teach me how to ‘rejoice when [I] share in the sufferings of Christ’ as St. Peter says ‘that [I] may also rejoice exultantly when his glory is revealed’” (1 Pet 4).