

Today we follow up on the Feast of the Holy Cross with a day when we term Mary, our Lady of Sorrows.

For it is at the foot of the Cross, when that sword, of which Simeon had prophesied, would pierce Mary's heart that Jesus says to his mother:

Woman behold your son.

Then to John, who had a special bond of affection with Jesus, the Lord said:

Son, behold your mother

The Church as born at the Foot of the Cross. For there as John will tell us a few verses later in his Gospel Jesus's side will be pierced, from which will flow the water of baptism and the blood of the Eucharist. For just as Adam fell into a deep sleep and from his side was brought forth his bride Eve, so too out of the sleep of death Jesus' Bride the Church came forth. The Church was born at that place of deepest sorrow and Jesus wanted us to hear in his words to Mary the Second Annunciation.

Think of our Lady's Sorrows this way..... ¹

An angel of light went out from the great white Throne of Light and descended over Israel, past the daughters of the great kingdoms and empires, and came to where a humble virgin of Nazareth knelt in prayer, and said, "Hail, full of grace!" These were not words; they were the Word. "And the Word became flesh." This was the first Annunciation. Nine months passed and once more an angel from that great white Throne of Light came down to shepherds on Judean hills, teaching them the joy of a "Gloria in excelsis," and bidding them worship Him Whom the world could not contain, a "Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger." Eternity became time, Divinity incarnate, God a man; Omnipotence was discovered in bonds. In the language of Saint Luke, Mary "brought forth her firstborn Son... and laid Him in a manger." This was the first Nativity.

Then came Nazareth and the carpenter shop where one can imagine the Divine Boy, straitened until baptized with a baptism of blood, fashioning a little cross in anticipation of a great Cross that would one day be His on Calvary. One can also imagine Him in the evening of a day of labor at the bench, stretching out His arms in exhausted relaxation, while the setting sun traced on the opposite wall the shadow of a man on a cross. One can, too, imagine His Mother seeing in each nail the prophecy and the telltale of a day when men would carpenter to a Cross the One who carpentered the universe.

Nazareth passed into Calvary, and the nails of the shop into the nails of human malignity. From the Cross He completed His last will and testament. He had already committed His blood to the

¹ As told by Archbishop Fulton Sheen.

Church, His garments to His enemies, a thief to Paradise, and would soon commend His body to the grave and His soul to His Heavenly Father.

To whom, then, could He give the two treasures which He loved above all others, Mary and John? He would bequeath them to one another, giving at once a son to His Mother and a Mother to His friend. "Woman!" It was the second Annunciation! The midnight hour, the silent room, the ecstatic prayer had given way to the mount of Calvary, the darkened sky, and a Son hanging on a Cross. Yet, what consolation! It was only an angel who made the first Annunciation, but it is God's own sweet voice which makes the second. "Behold your son!" It was the second Nativity! Mary had brought forth her First-born without labour. (Aside: We know from Genesis that the pains of child birth was a consequence of the Sin of Adam and Eve. A Sin from which Mary was Immaculate). Such a birth happened in the cave of Bethlehem; she now brings forth her second-born, John, in the labours of the Cross. At this moment Mary is undergoing the pains of childbirth, not only for her second-born, who is John, but also for the millions who will be born to her in Christian ages as "Children of Mary." Now we can understand why Christ was called "her First-born." It was not because she was to have other children by the blood of flesh, but because she was to have other children by the blood of her heart. Truly, indeed, the Divine condemnation against Eve (that is the pain accompanying child birth) is now renewed against the new Eve, Mary, for she is bringing forth her children in sorrow. Mary, then, is not only the Mother of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, but she is also our Mother, and this not by a title of courtesy, not by legal fiction, not by a mere figure of speech, but by the right of bringing us forth in sorrow at the foot of the Cross. It was by weakness and disobedience at the foot of the tree of Good and Evil that Eve lost the title, Mother of the Living; it is at the foot of the tree of the Cross that Mary, by sacrifice and obedience, regained for us the title, Mother of the Living. What a destiny to have the Mother of God as my Mother and Jesus as my Brother!