

THE SEVEN SORROWS OF MARY

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What Are the Seven Sorrows of Mary?

Love is what gave Our Lady the courage to accept Simeon's prophecy.

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We tend to think of Mary as the Sorrowful Mother during Lent. We know from Scripture that she was there, standing at the foot of the Cross with the Apostle John. She's mentioned twice when we pray the Stations of the Cross – in the Fourth Station, when she meets her Son on the way to Golgotha and in the Thirteenth Station when Jesus' dead body is placed in her arms. Also during Lent, we sing or pray the Stabat Mater, a medieval Latin hymn describing Mary's terrible sorrow over her Son's suffering. It's hard *not* to think of Mary as we contemplate our Lord's Passion and Crucifixion.

In that respect, it's fitting that the Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows take place the day after the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, observed annually on September 14. On that day, we celebrate the finding of the True Cross by St. Helena in the fourth century and its veneration throughout the centuries since. On the Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows, we venerate the Mother of the Crucified One in appreciation of the terrible grief she endured as her Son suffered.

But, that's not the only sorrow Mary endured, and it's not the only one we honor on this feast day.

There are seven.

These seven sorrows were foretold by Simeon in the Temple when he encountered the Holy Family at the Presentation of Jesus.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of

Israel, and the holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord.

He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying:

“Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.”

The child’s father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted and you yourself a sword will pierce so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” (Lk 2:25-35)

The feast of Our Lady of Sorrows dates back to the twelfth century. Since at least that time, Catholics have recognized seven events in the life of Mary that caused her great sorrow. That is why the image of Mary as Our Lady of Sorrows often shows her with seven swords piercing her Immaculate Heart. She’s also sometimes represented by a winged heart pierced with seven swords. The swords represent her grievous sorrows. Known as the Seven Dolors of Mary, these sorrows are:

1. The prophecy of Simeon (*Luke 2:25-35*)
2. The flight into Egypt (*Matthew 2:13-15*)
3. Loss of the Child Jesus for three days (*Luke 2:41-50*)
4. Mary meets Jesus on his way to Calvary (*Luke 23:27-31; John 19:17*)
5. Crucifixion and Death of Jesus (*John 19:25-30*)
6. The body of Jesus being taken from the Cross (*Psalms 130; Luke 23:50-54; John 19:31-37*)

7. The burial of Jesus (*Isaiah 53:8; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42; Mark 15:40-47*)

That's a lot for one woman to endure in a lifetime! Yet, Mary wasn't just another woman; she was *the* woman chosen by God to bear his Son. With that great joy and responsibility also came great sorrow. Along with her great joy and sorrow came great love – for each one of us as her children. This is what our Lord asked of her as he hung dying on the Cross – to become Mother to all humankind. Love is what gave her the courage to accept Simeon's prophecy. Love is what gave her the strength to embrace each sword as it pierced her heart. Love is what urged her to accept her Son's dying request. Love is what compels her to continue caring for us tenderly, limitlessly, and faithfully.