



Mary, at the foot of the Cross: Sharer in the Cross of her Son

Dear Friends of the Cross,

St. John Paul the Great teaches that Mary, by wholeheartedly accepting the Angel Gabriel's message that she would be the Mother of the Messiah, began her participation in the drama of humanity's Redemption from that very moment. Her participation in the sacrifice of her Son on the Cross would accompany her throughout her life. This participation was revealed to her when her Son was very young, when she presented Him in the Temple; there the prophet Simeon prophesied that a sword would pierce her soul, the first great sorrow of the Blessed Virgin, as she pondered all these things in her heart.

Years later, when the child Jesus was lost for three days, a new sword of sorrow pierced her soul. Tradition has it that Mary was pierced seven times with swords of sorrow, and that these constitute her Seven Sorrows. Fulton Sheen speaks not of Seven Swords, but of Seven thrusts or strokes of a Sword, and this Sword which pierced her soul was Christ Himself.¹ He willed His Mother to be united with Him as closely as any human could be with the Divine. It was a sword of union, that pierced both their hearts.

Pope Pius XII declared that, as the true Queen of Martyrs, she, more than any of the faithful, has suffered for His Body, the Church, the sufferings that were lacking in the Passion of Christ.² This was the first reason why God allowed in Her the sorrows, so that She could be the first, immediately after the Redeemer, to continue His Passion and Death in His Mystical Body. Who is there who loves and does not want to participate in the sufferings of the beloved?

But Mary also had to suffer for our sake, just as she suffered for Him. Christ drove the sword into Mary's Soul, in the sense that He called her to be a Co-operator with Him, as the New Eve in the regeneration of mankind. Pope Leo XIII says: 'God willed that the grace and truth which Christ brought about for us should be given to us by no other means than through Mary'³. The Second Vatican Council underlines the profound dimension of Our Lady's presence on Calvary, recalling that "she faithfully maintained her union with her Son even to the Cross"⁴; and affirms that this intimate union "in the work of salvation is manifested from the moment of Christ's virginal conception until his death".⁵

Let us now pause to consider the Blessed Virgin's profound adherence to the redemptive Passion of her Son, an adherence that is achieved through her participation in his

¹ Quoted by Fulton Sheen, *The World's First Love*, p.192.

² *Ibid.*, p.193.

³ Quoted by Fulton Sheen, *El primer Amor del mundo*, p.192.

⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, n. 58.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

Cross. At the foot of the Cross, Mary "suffered intensely with her Son and united herself to his sacrifice with the heart of a Mother who, full of love, gave her consent to the immolation of her Son as Victim"⁶ for all of us, to give us new life and life in abundance.

With these words, the Council reminds us of the "compassion of Mary", in whose heart all that Jesus suffers in soul and body is reflected, emphasizing her willingness to participate in the redemptive sacrifice and thus to unite her maternal suffering to the priestly offering of her Son. It further emphasizes that her consent to the immolation of Jesus constitutes an authentic act of love, with which she offers her Son as a "victim" of atonement for the sins of all mankind. In the drama of Calvary, Mary was sustained by faith—a faith deepened throughout her life, especially during Christ's public ministry. "[T]he Blessed Virgin advanced on the pilgrimage of faith and faithfully maintained her union with her Son even to the Cross"⁷.

Sister María Josefa Menéndez, a mystical nun of the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (1890 – 1923), recounts her mystical revelations of Jesus and Mary saying: "On the road to Calvary, when our Lord was carrying the cross on his shoulders, his Mother came out to meet him... with her Heart pierced with pain for two purposes: to gain new strength to suffer in the sight of God... and to give her Son, by her heroic attitude, encouragement to continue the work of redemption. Consider the martyrdom of these two Hearts: what the Mother loves most is her Son... and she can give him no relief, and she knows that seeing her Son will increase her sufferings."⁸.

On another occasion, Jesus reveals to Sister Maria Josefa: "For Me the greatest thing is my Mother, and not only can I not console her, but the lamentable state in which she sees me, causes her Heart a suffering similar to mine: the death that I suffer in my body, My Mother receive in her Heart! Ah! How her eyes are fixed on Me! And mine, darkened and bloody, are also fixed on her! We do not utter a single word; but how many things our Hearts say to each other in this sorrowful gaze!" ... Jesus is silent. It seems that He was overcome with emotion at the memory of His Mother's sorrow, Josepha was overwhelmed, not daring to break the silence. At last she decided to ask her Master if Our Lady had heard of all his torments during the Passion.

"Yes," replied the Lord kindly, "my Mother was present at all the torments of my Passion, which by divine revelation were presented to Her spirit. Moreover, several disciples, while remaining at a distance for fear of the Jews, sought to be informed of everything, and they informed my Mother. When she knew that the sentence of death had already been pronounced, she went out to meet me and did not leave me until I was laid in the tomb."⁹ For her part, the Blessed Virgin addressed these words to her: "Look, my daughter, to what a state love has reduced him. The one you see here, in such a sad and pitiful state, is my Divine Son: love has brought him to death. And now love has led him to unite all men in bonds of brotherhood, giving them all to the same Mother"¹⁰.

To the cruel insults hurled against her Son, against the crucified Messiah, she, who shared his intimate dispositions, responds with indulgence and forgiveness, associating herself

⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁸ Sister María Josefa Menéndez, *Un llamada al Amor*, p. 337.

⁹ Sister María Josefa Menéndez, *Un llamada al Amor*, p.339.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p.340.

with his heroic plea to the Father: Forgive *them*, for *they know not what they do* (Lk 23:34). Sharing in the feeling of abandonment to the Father's will, which Jesus expressed in his last words on the Cross: Father, *into your hands I commend my spirit* (Lk 23:46), she thus gives, as the Council observes, a consent of love "to the immolation of her Son as Victim".¹¹

Mary's heroic hope at the foot of the Cross contains a stronger light than the darkness that reigns in many hearts: before the redemptive Sacrifice of Jesus, the hope of the Church and of humanity is born in Mary.

St. John in his Gospel tells us: *at the foot of the Cross of Jesus were his Mother and his Mother's sister, Mary, wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene* (Jn 19:25). With the verb "to be", which etymologically means "to stand", "to stand upright", the Evangelist wants to present the dignity and strength of Mary.

In particular, the fact that Our Lady "stood upright" at the foot of the Cross, recalls her unshakeable firmness and her extraordinary courage in the face of suffering. Mary at the foot of the Cross, sharer of the Cross of her Son, is the model of a love without measure...

*... May the five wounds of Christ
Be engraved in my heart
deeply, O Mother! As in Yours.
You who bore the Cross of my Saviour,
who shared the sorrows of your Son,
make me share in them with you¹²...*



¹¹ *Lumen Gentium*, 58.

¹² Stanza of the *Stabat Mater*