

Mary's Joyful Sadness

The Blessed Virgin always knew that her son would die. She knew because she was well-versed in the Old Testament prophecies. She was familiar with the Song of the Suffering Servant – that plaintive dirge that declared that God's innocent servant would be punished for *our* sins and crushed for *our* iniquities.

She also knew because Gabriel told her and because Simeon confirmed it. She knew she would be *the* Mother of Sorrows because her Son was *the* Man of Sorrows prophesied by Isaiah. She knew all this and yet it did not crush her. She was sustained like an ark floating on flood waters because she knew that his suffering would be the ointment that would bring healing to the world. His exaltation would not spring from political victory but from a well of deep sorrow. This was the reason for her joyful sadness during the course of her earthly sojourn.

As long as we are on earth and have not yet arrived at the fullness of the future life, we can never have true love without sacrifice and pain. This pain becomes sweet and lovable; it is the source of interior joy. Love brings joy, but a joy whose roots are in the shape of a cross.

(St. Josemaría Escrivá Christ is Passing By, no. 43)

The awareness of her Son's imminent passion flowed inside her like an underground spring waiting to erupt to the surface at any moment. And though the thought of the passion would not always occupy her mind, the latent awareness of it would emerge from time to time on her countenance; it would make itself felt in the tone of her voice or manifest itself in her gestures. The words of the bride in the Song of Songs could well be applied to her in this regard: "A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me, that lies all night between my breasts." (Cf. 1:13)

It was only after her Assumption into heaven that this tension between joy and sorrow was fully transfigured into the heavenly joy of the beatific vision. For the first time in her life she knew with certainty that no circumstance would make her have to dispense with her Beloved. No more disappearance in the Temple nor leaving of her home in Nazareth. No more dying on the cross or ascension into heaven. Nothing more to make her heart miss a beat. The Assumption could easily be classified as *the* happiest day of her life because she knew, with the certainty of ripened fruit, that she would *finally* be with Him forever.

If the Assumption was her day of triumph (she triumphed over sin) and her Coronation was her day of honour (she was rewarded for her excellence as the most perfect fruit of creation); the day she stood in perfect virtue at the foot of the cross, was her most glorious day on earth. The virtues and glories of this moment are captured in the song *Stabat Mater* – recognized by many as the tenderest and most touching Marian hymn of the Middle Ages. *Stabat Mater* means "the Mother was standing." In the simplest, and at the same time in the most vivid manner, it represents the Blessed Mother of God plunged in grief and weeping beneath the Cross on which her beloved Son was suffering

so unmerited and so painful a death. The historical event (John 19: 25) is narrated in the first, second and fourth stanzas. The remaining stanzas are made up of reflections, affections, petitions, and resolutions arising from the contemplation of Our Lord's bitter sufferings and death.

The *Stabat Mater* was introduced into the Liturgy gradually until 1727 when it was prescribed as a Sequence for Mass of the Seven Sorrows of Mary on September 15 and on Friday before Holy Week. The *Stabat Mater*'s popularity is reflected by its use in the popular devotion of the Stations of the Cross. During the sixteenth century, the sequence motet was a favourite form among important musical composers. It was frequently given elaborate polyphonic settings. A model of such settings is Palestrina's famous *Stabat Mater* which employs two choruses and combines several couplets to suggest larger musical units within the total composition. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the *Stabat Mater* inspired large works for chorus and orchestra. The hymn's text was divided into a number of autonomous and differentiated movements. Compositions of this type were those of Seffani, Scarlatti, Pergolesi, Boccherini, and Haydn. During the nineteenth century, the popularity of the *Stabat Mater*'s text is evident by its place in the work of Verdi, Rossini, Schubert, and Dvorak.

If songs are composed by men to glorify women, then Mary still wins the lottery for the most glorified woman on earth ... AND in heaven.

I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope. In me is all grace of the way and of the truth, in me is all hope of life and of virtue. Come to me, all ye that desire me, and be filled with my fruits.

Sirach 24:24-26

ChatGPT will most likely tell you that the most glorified woman on earth at the moment is Lady Gaga, Beyoncé or Taylor Swift; but this is because it is trained on modern data ... and because the modern world knows nothing about sorrow. It shuns suffering as a way to glory. "My servant shall be raised high and greatly exalted." (Isaiah 52:13). The modern world knows nothing about the kind of exaltation that comes about as a consequence of self-abasement or the joy that emerges from sorrow... but Mary Knew. She, the *Hodegetria*, shows the way. She shows it by pointing towards Him who is The Way.

