Today we’ll begin our meditations with the Presentation in the Temple. In St. Luke’s Gospel (2: 27-35) we read, “Simeon 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.”

Mary’s experience in the Temple began joyfully enough, with the elderly Simeon welcoming the child Jesus and proclaiming him as the long-awaited Messiah. But then there was a sudden change of mood when Simeon prophesied that Jesus would be a source of controversy and that a sword would pierce Mary’s heart. A sword thrust in one’s heart wouldn’t cause just a superficial wound; but a fatal one. Mary now realized that her Son would be a suffering servant and that she would suffer along with him. After the fiat of the Annunciation, God asked her for a new fiat. He asked her to accept a crucifying motherhood so that she could be intimately united to her Son’s saving mission.

How could she have felt at this jarring news? Was she tempted to run away from her vocation? We would have been! But we know she didn’t run away! During the Saturday night prayer vigil at World Youth Day Pope Francis spoke of Mary’s extraordinary yes to God’s call. It was not a tentative yes. She didn’t say, “Well, let’s give it a try, and see what happens.” Mary was determined, “she knew what was at stake and said ‘yes,’ getting straight to the point. It was something more, something different. It was the ‘yes’ of someone prepared to be committed, someone willing to take a risk, ready to stake everything she had, with no more security than the certainty of knowing
that she was the bearer of a promise.... Mary did not take out an insurance policy! ... The ‘yes’ and the desire to serve were stronger than any doubts and difficulties.... Mary’s mission would undoubtedly be difficult, but the challenges that lay ahead were no reason to say ‘no.’”

During World Youth Day Pope Francis asked young people if they see themselves as bearers of a promise, if they are ready to commit themselves, to stake everything they have on Christ, like Mary did. This week as we reflect on Simeon’s prophecy to Mary in the Temple, let’s ask her for the grace to always say yes to God, no matter what. And let’s ask this grace for young people in the Church.
The second of Mary’s seven sorrows is the Flight into Egypt. St. Matthew’s Gospel (2:13-16) tells the story: “Behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.’ Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’ When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had ascertained from the magi.”

This mystery gives us a lot to think about. In the Flight into Egypt we see that it didn’t take long for Jesus to become a sign of contradiction, and we are reminded that in every age misunderstanding, opposition and even hostility accompany the followers of Christ. The Cross is always present. The Flight into Egypt reminds us to pray for the innocent young victims of abortion, child abuse and violence of all types, for refugees, migrants and the homeless, and for those who are persecuted for the sake of Christ. As we remember these worthy intentions, let’s also pause and reflect on what the Flight into Egypt teaches us about Mary and Joseph.

I’m sure the couple had prepared a safe and comfortable home where they expected to raise their Son. But Jesus was born in primitive circumstances beyond their control. Then the young family was forced to leave their idea of home behind for good, becoming refugees in a foreign land. In order to protect their very special baby they left everything behind and experienced insecurities and depravations of all kinds. But no sacrifice was too great for them. They faced their new situation with courage. After the fiats of the Annunciation and the Presentation in the Temple, God asked another fiat of Mary and Joseph, drawing them further out into the deep.

It struck me that Mary and Joseph are great examples of putting out into the deep. Last year’s Synod Fathers wrote to young people: “Mission is a sure target for life’s journey, but not a ‘satellite navigation system’ which lays out the whole route in advance. Freedom always entails
a dimension of risk…. Many pages in the Gospel portray Jesus inviting us to be daring, to put out into the deep, to pass from the logic of following commandments to that of generous and unconditional gift, without concealing the requirement to take up one’s cross (cf. Mt 16:24). He is radical: ‘He gives all and he asks all: he gives a love that is total and asks for an undivided heart’ (Francis, Homily, 14 October 2018).”

Something we notice in working with young people is that for some, discernment never seems to end. We call them perpetual disciners! I attended a vocation talk where the speaker, a theology professor, recognized this tendency and emphasized that vocational discernment is not meant to go on indefinitely. It should come to a definite end with a committed YES that leads to action! I thought that was very good advice.

This is what Mary and Joseph did, isn’t it? Each time they received a message from an angel they sprang into action. In the Flight into Egypt they traveled light in order to hold Jesus close to their hearts. As we ponder this mystery let’s ask for young people the grace to listen attentively to God’s voice speaking in their hearts, and the courage to say YES — to take risks and leave everything behind, putting out into the deep and going wherever God leads them, even when he leads them to the Cross.

Let’s also ask for young people the grace of compassion and empathy for those who suffer in any way, especially for those who have been wounded in any way by abortion, (02-12) for migrants and refugees who find their dignity ignored, for the homeless and anyone who is vulnerable before the inhumane attitudes of our throw-away culture.
In this third of Mary’s sorrows we jump ahead several years. Saint Luke relates this scene in his Gospel (2:41-51): “Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom. After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astonished at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, ‘Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety. And he said to them, ‘Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.”

This Scripture passage teaches us something important about Jesus, and something equally important about his parents. First we can see that at 12 years old, Jesus had an understanding of his uniqueness and his mission. “Did you not know that I had to be in my Father’s house?” Developing an identity of one’s own apart from one’s parents is a normal part of adolescence, and so Jesus was like other young people in this respect. By staying behind in Jerusalem without telling his parents he was beginning to forge his own path in life. At age 12, he already knew who his real Father was, even though he had known Joseph as his earthly father ever since his birth.

Now let’s look at Mary’s reaction when she finds Jesus in the Temple. St. Luke tells us that Jesus’ parents did not understand what he said to them. “Son, why have you done this to us?” Parents and other family members often fail to understand when a young person shares their dream of a vocation in the Church. Ambition, social pressures and even anti-religious prejudice often prevent families from even teaching their children to see life as a vocation given by God.

The Gospel account of the adolescent Jesus, subject to his parents but able to detach himself...
from them to follow his own vocation, sheds valuable light on how the Gospel influences family relationships.

Mary let her Son know that he had caused them anxiety, but she didn’t scold or discourage him. We are told that she kept all these things in her heart. I think this means that she tried the best she could to understand her Son as he was. Saint John Paul II, who wrote so much about Mary, taught that there was a certain darkness to Mary’s faith; everything wasn’t always crystal clear. She must have suffered due to her inability to understand and the emotional distance from her Son this caused. But she kept it all in her heart, remained close to her Son and grew in faith. Her life was a pilgrimage of faith; she didn’t always have it all together.

After this scene in the Temple the Holy Family kind of falls off the radar and we don’t hear about them again until Jesus has reached adulthood and begins his public ministry. Mary is mentioned several times during Jesus’ active ministry, for example at the wedding feast of Cana. She must have experienced ups and downs in her life as the Lord’s mother and first disciple, and there must have been many days when she just didn’t grasp what was happening.

I often reflect on Jesus’ first appearance in the synagogue in Nazareth. Although Mary’s presence isn’t mentioned, we can assume she was there, since it was their hometown. How must she have felt when her Son told his compatriots that a prophet is never welcome in his own country, and when they tried to throw him over the brow of the hill?

What we do know is that Mary persevered in faith through good times and bad, even when she didn’t understand. Father Don Calloway, a Marian Father of the Immaculate Conception and popular author, noted that “Our society, and this generation in particular, has grown up with a poor aptitude for persevering. As soon as things don’t go our way,” he wrote, “we tend to jump ship and look for other options…. As soon as there is some inconvenience or a burden, there is a tendency to try and ‘break free’ …. ‘If this relationship begins to cause me hardship, I’m out....’”

Mary didn’t do this. She can teach us perseverance and faithfulness to our vocation and she will obtain these graces for ourselves and for young people if we ask her for them.
A long period of time transpires between the scene in last week’s reflection, the finding of Jesus in the Temple, and this week’s. Suddenly we find ourselves in Holy Week. Scripture does not mention Mary’s presence along the Way of the Cross, but the traditional Stations of the Cross commemorate the encounter between Jesus and his mother as the fourth Station. Here is what St. Matthew tells us about the Way of the Cross and the events preceding it (27:27-32): “Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus inside the praetorium and gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped off his clothes and threw a scarlet military cloak about him. Weaving a crown out of thorns, they placed it on his head, and a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ They spat upon him and took the reed and kept striking him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the cloak, dressed him in his own clothes, and led him off to crucify him. As they were going out, they met a Cyrenian named Simon; this man they pressed into service to carry his cross.”

For me, the encounter between Mary and Jesus on the Way of the Cross is all about Mary’s compassion, which means, literally, to suffer with. It is also about her sheer grit and unwavering courage. Jesus knew that his mother loved him and that she had followed him to Jerusalem. He didn’t need Mary to accompany him all the way to Golgotha; after all, she couldn’t change the course of events. Mary could have stayed out of view, in a safe place, praying and grieving for her Son. But that wasn’t Mary’s way. She was going to follow him to the end.

In Mary there were two seemingly contradictory agonies — on the one hand, the longing to save her Son from his unbearable suffering; and on the other, the desire to help him finish the work that the Father had given him to do. We know which one prevailed. Mary willed herself to follow Jesus all the way to Golgotha so that she could give him to the world on the Cross, just as she had given him to the world in the stable. Mary’s human, maternal love, remained conformed to the will of God. Her personal agony did not paralyze her soul because there was nothing selfish about it. Just as she accompanied Jesus and suffered with him, she stands close by those who suffer in every place and every time.
The Synod Fathers recognized that young people suffer and need accompaniment. “The young, like everyone else, also carry wounds,” they wrote. “There are the wounds of the defeats they have suffered, frustrated desires, experiences of discrimination and injustice, of not feeling loved or recognized. There are physical and psychological wounds. Christ, who consented to endure his passion and death, comes close, through his cross, to all suffering young people.... Today more than ever, to be reconciled with one’s wounds is a necessary condition for a good life. The Church is called to support all the young in their trials and to promote whatever pastoral action may be needed.”

As older, more experienced members of the Church, we can offer young people this support. But what does this look like? A passage from Pope Francis’ letter on the Joy of the Gospel gives me a lot of inspiration. He said that the believing community should get involved in people’s lives, that it should bridge distances and be ready to abase itself if necessary. He said that believers should touch the suffering flesh of Christ in others. And he said an evangelizing community is supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be, without any regard for time constraints.

At World Youth Day Pope Francis reminded us that Jesus’ Way of the Cross continues today. The following is just an excerpt of a long prayer he offered, and I’ll end with this because I think it tells us how we should pray this week:

“Father, today your Son’s way of the cross
continues: it continues in the muffled cry of children kept from being born and of so many others denied the right to a childhood, a family, an education; of children not able to play, sing or dream... and in the saddened eyes of young people who see their hopes for the future snatched away for lack of education and dignified work;

It continues in the anguish of young faces, our friends, who fall into the snares of unscrupulous people – including people who claim to be serving you, Lord.... Your Son’s way of the cross continues in those young people with downcast faces who have lost the ability to dream, create and shape their future, and have already chosen to “retire” in glum resignation or complacency, one of the narcotics most consumed in our time.

Your Son’s passion continues in the despairing solitude of the elderly, whom we have discarded and abandoned.... It is prolonged in a society that has lost the ability to weep and to be moved by suffering. Yes, Father, Jesus keeps walking, carrying his cross and suffering in all these faces, while an uncaring world is caught up in comfortable cynicism and in the drama of its own frivolity.

And we, Lord, what are we to do? And we, Father of mercy, do we console and accompany the Lord, helpless and suffering in the poorest and most abandoned of our brothers and sisters? Do we help carry the burden of the cross, like Simon of Cyrene, by being peacemakers, builders of bridges, a leaven of fraternity? Do we have the courage to remain, like Mary, at the foot of the cross?”

These are good questions to ask ourselves and to share with young people this week.
This week we reach the culmination of Christ’s saving mission, his crucifixion and death. This is the fifth of Mary’s seven sorrows. This week’s key word is STANDING. St John tells us in his Gospel (19:25-30), “Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home. After this, aware that everything was now finished, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I thirst.” There was a vessel filled with common wine. So they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth. When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, “It is finished.” And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit.”

As I mentioned, this week’s key word is STANDING. Some artists portray Mary stooped over sobbing, or swooning in St John’s arms at the foot of the Cross. But Scripture tells us that Mary STOOD there. Does her posture at that moment really matter? I think it does, or St. John wouldn’t have mentioned it. Mary wasn’t hysterical, crushed with sadness or turned in on herself as her Son hung there dying — she stood strong before Jesus crucified, as close as she could, in order to take it all in and to experience all his bodily sufferings with him — seeing them, contemplating them and loving them with a Mother’s compassion.

How could she be so strong? Thinking about Mary standing at the foot of the Cross I am reminded of stories of parents who summon more courage and endurance than seems humanly possible to care for a child who is sick, injured or in trouble. This is a parent’s unconditional, undying love, and Mary’s love rose to a level infinitely higher than even the best of ordinary parents because she was full of grace and the Holy Spirit.
I’d like to quote one of our favorite authors, Jean Lafrance: “Standing near the Cross, Mary cruelly suffered with her only Son, associated with a motherly heart to his sacrifice, giving the consent of her love to the immolation of the victim born of her flesh. That is where her heart was really pierced as with a sword…. Her love was immeasurably great and we know that the one who loves more suffers more. In her human nature the Mother of God could not have endured such a pain, but she surrendered herself to the will of God and, comforted by the Holy Spirit, she received the strength to bear her suffering....”

In his prayer after the Way of the Cross during World Youth Day Pope Francis also emphasized the significance of her STANDING before her crucified Son:

“Let us look to Mary, woman of strength. From her let us learn how to stand beneath the cross with her same determination and courage, without evasions or illusions. She accompanied the suffering of her Son ... she supported him by her gaze and protected him with her heart. She shared his suffering, yet was not overwhelmed by it. She was the woman of strength who uttered her ‘yes,’ who supports and accompanies, protects and embraces. She is the great guardian of hope.

We too, Father, want to be a Church that supports and accompanies, that is able to say, ‘Here I am!’ in the lives and amid the crosses of all those Christs who walk by our side....

From her we want to learn to stand beneath the cross, but not with hearts tightly shut, rather with hearts that can accompany, that feel tenderness and devotion, that show mercy and treat others with respect, sensitivity and understanding.... Father, like Mary we want to learn what it means to ‘stand.’

Lord, teach us to stand, at the foot of the cross, at the foot of every cross. Open our eyes and hearts ... and rescue us from paralysis and uncertainty, from fear and from desperation. Father, teach us to say: Here I stand, alongside your Son, alongside Mary and alongside all those beloved disciples who desire to welcome your Kingdom into their heart. Amen”

Let’s offer this prayer in the name of the young people we know.
This week we ponder Mary’s sorrow as she received the body of her dead Son into her arms. Like their encounter on the way to Calvary, this scene is not explicitly mentioned in Scripture, but in St. John’s Gospel (19:31-37) we do read about how Jesus’ body was treated after his death: “Now since it was preparation day, in order that the bodies might not remain on the cross on the sabbath, for the sabbath day of that week was a solemn one, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs be broken and they be taken down. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and then of the other one who was crucified with Jesus. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out.”

Tradition tells us that when the body of Jesus was taken down from the Cross his Mother took him in her arms. I think it’s a natural reaction, when someone dies, to want to see and touch their body. We often see this when our Residents die — family members seem to want to linger, to hold their deceased loved one’s hand or stroke their hair, to give them a final kiss, say a prayer, or share one last story. Sometimes it helps the family members to prove to themselves that their loved one is really gone, or they need time to let the reality sink in; or maybe they want to engrave their loved one’s features in their memory.

In Mary’s case the body taken down from the Cross was the Son she had brought into the world and wrapped in swaddling cloths. It was the Son she had bathed and fed and rocked to sleep at night. This was the same body, but now he was so bruised, bloodied and broken that he was
nearly beyond human appearance. It had to be very difficult for her to confront the horrible reality before her eyes, but I’m sure lingered over each wound, compassionating with her Son’s pain.

Perhaps Mary ran her fingers over the gaping hole created by the soldier’s lance, trying to close it up just a bit. I never really thought about this before, but, Jesus was already dead when the soldier pierced his side and blood and water flowed out. Setting aside any theological interpretation, why did the soldier violently stab someone he knew was already dead? It was brutal and unnecessary, like when a killer stands over his victim firing excessive shots into the body at point blank range.

How cruelly they treated Mary’s Son! They didn’t need to inflict that final wound unless it was for Mary herself — since he was already dead Jesus couldn’t feel the pain of the lance, but Mary could — perhaps this was the sword that pierced her own heart, as Simeon’s prophecy had foretold. In any case, Mary must have grieved to see how disrespectfully they treated her Son’s body.

Reflecting on this scene I thought of all the ways that the human body is disrespected in today’s throw-away culture: from abortion and euthanasia to human trafficking, violent crime, substance abuse and pornography. During World Youth Day Pope Francis spoke about these grave violations of human dignity; he prayed for the victims and asked his audiences not to succumb to the temptation to treat themselves and others with such contempt. His prayer after the Way of the Cross, which we have already quoted, and which appears in its entirety on our website, is worth reading again and again.

On another occasion Pope Francis wrote, “Our defense of the innocent unborn ... needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development. Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection. We cannot uphold an ideal of holiness that would ignore injustice in a world where some revel, spend with abandon and live only for the latest consumer goods, even as others look on from afar, living their entire lives in abject poverty.”

As we contemplate the pieta this week let’s pray in a special way for the victims of our throw-away culture, and let’s ask for all young people a right understanding of the dignity of every human life created in the image and likeness of God.
In St. John's Gospel (19:38-42) we read about Jesus' burial, the seventh of Mary's sorrows: “After this, Joseph of Arimathaea, secretly a disciple of Jesus for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate if he could remove the body of Jesus. And Pilate permitted it. So he came and took his body. Nicodemus, the one who had first come to him at night, also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing about one hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and bound it with burial cloths along with the spices, according to the Jewish burial custom. Now in the place where he had been crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had yet been buried. So they laid Jesus there because of the Jewish preparation day; for the tomb was close by.”

Jesus' burial reminds me of another passage from St. John's Gospel (12:23-26): “Truly, truly I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

Christ allowed himself to become the grain of wheat fallen into the ground; he gave himself as bread broken, completely broken. Once he went into the tomb was everything finished? Was it all over? We know for sure that it didn’t! The grain of wheat that died produced a rich harvest that keeps on giving to this day, and in the bread broken and blessed, there is always new life. Christ will always be present among us in the Eucharist, through his Spirit and in his Mystical Body.

The Church’s teaching on the Mystical Body is so beautiful and uplifting. I’d like to borrow again today from Father Donald Calloway because he does a really good job writing about the Mystical Body. “Through Baptism and the Eucharist we are incorporated into the Mystical Body. Each of us has a mission and a vocation and is called to cooperate” with Jesus the head, with the Holy Spirit, the soul, and with Mary, the heart of the Mystical Body, in order to flourish and produce fruit for the body.”
The mystical Body gives us the privilege of being able to offer up our sufferings to Christ. Saint Paul tells us, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Col 1:24). On one level there is nothing lacking in the work of salvation that Jesus has accomplished, Father Calloway writes. “However, he desires his followers to participate and contribute their own sufferings to his, so that he can continue his saving work in and through us.” He lives in his members and incorporates their sufferings and hardships into his own body, giving them a redemptive quality.” Jesus invites his followers to be sharers in his cross and co-sufferers with him. In this way the cross each of us is invited to carry becomes life-giving.

“No one loved more, or was more co-victim with Christ, than Mary,” Fr. Calloway writes. “... As the heart of the mystical body, she never stopped beating; she never died. It was the desire of Jesus, the head, that the heart, Mary, animated and sustained by the Holy Spirit, keep the members of the body (and you and me) alive while he experienced death for our sake. This makes Mary the very heart of hope: our life, our sweetness and our hope.”

“Mary was interiorly crucified with Jesus, having her own maternal heart torn apart. But she offered it all to God and underwent her own tortuous agony in union with Christ, so that souls could have life. God thus made her the ultimate model for the co-suffering, co-redeeming Church.... She shows us how to give all of our pain and suffering to Jesus so it can be used for good....

As Christ lay in the tomb for three days, “Mary held it all together,” believing and completely trusting in the truth of all that he had said. “She was the heart of hope. We can have total confidence to go to her with all of our needs, all of our brokenness and all of our wounds.”

Mary has always held it all together, hasn’t she? We have always been able to go to her with all of our needs, our brokenness and our wounds, but also our hopes and dreams. In Panama Pope Francis told young people they should be able to count on the older generations to provide them with roots and foundations from which they can grow. I think it would be a really wonderful Easter gift if we who are older — whether a little older or a lot — could help the young people we know discover a relationship with Mary, the Mother of hope who stands beneath every Cross and who will lead them to the pierced heart of her Son, the font of all mercy.

As we conclude these meditations on Mary’s seven sorrows I’d like to reflect on one more excerpt from Pope Francis, this one the conclusion to his original message for World Youth Day 2019. He asked the young to meditate on Mary’s love, and I would invite you to do that now with her seven sorrows as your point of departure. “Contemplate Mary’s love: a caring, dynamic
and concrete love. A love full of boldness and focused completely on the gift of self,” Pope Francis wrote. “A Church permeated by these Marian qualities will always be a Church going forth, one that goes beyond her own limits and boundaries to let the grace she has received overflow. If we allow ourselves to be truly touched by Mary’s example, we will live out authentically that charity which urges us to love God above all else and above ourselves, to love those with whom we share our daily life. And we will also love those who may seem hardly lovable in themselves. It is a love that is service and dedication, above all towards the weakest and poorest, love that transforms our faces and fills us with joy.”

We’ve come to the end of this series on Mary’s seven sorrows, and soon we will step with her into the joy of Easter! We’ve spent seven weeks reflecting on Mary’s bold, concrete and undying love. I hope this has inspired you to imitate these Marian qualities and to reach out to others, especially the young. As you continue to contemplate the mysteries of the rosary don’t forget that meditating on these mysteries releases their saving power into the world anew, so we can help to lift up the world at a time when our world really needs lifting up!

Scripture doesn’t recount the reunion between Jesus and his Mother on Easter morning, but theologians and spiritual writers throughout history have voiced their certainty that Mary would have been the first person Christ sought out after his resurrection. Imagine her joy to receive her risen Son’s embrace! Our prayer for you this Easter is that you too will experience the warm and joy-filled embrace of the Risen Christ. On behalf of all the Little Sisters of the Poor and our elderly Residents around the country I wish you a very blessed Easter!