



Mary, the heart of the Mystical Body

The Seven Sorrows Rosary, Week 6

Mary receives the Body of Jesus in Her Arms

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.