

Part II – Mary’s Name, Her Sorrows and Her Mercy

We celebrated Mary’s holy name on September 12, her sorrows on September 15, and on September 24, the feast of Our Lady of Ransom, also known as Our Lady of Mercy.

As for the name Mary, it has somewhat different meanings in the varied languages of origin and translation. The most widely accepted origin of the name is from the Hebrew “miryam” but that raises the question why the name, if of Hebrew origin, is found nowhere in the Hebrew Scriptures except for the name of Moses’ sister, Miriam. Was it more Egyptian than Hebrew, since Moses and Miriam grew up in Egypt, and hence the Jewish people would not have used an Egyptian name? One translation is “rebellion” and some refer to Miriam’s rebellion against Moses, but it would not be a fitting interpretation for Our Lady. Another view is that it comes from the Hebrew word “mar” meaning “sea” and “yam” meaning “bitter”, a meaning that fits so well the bitter sea of sorrow that would be Mary’s as co-redeemer with Christ in His Passion and death, and also alludes to her being a refuge for us in the valley of *our tears*. St. Jerome associated the name with the Latin phrase *Stella Maris*, “Star of the Sea” or “drop of the sea.” Mary as the model of Faith is indeed a light to us in the sea of life’s storms. Others suggest a Semitic meaning of “beautiful” that led many of the Church Fathers to accept the interpretation of “Lady.” Hence, we have grown up with the title, “Our Lady.” Still others trace the name Mary to the Egyptian “mer” or “mar” to “love,” and the Hebrew “Yam” or “Yahweh,” meaning “one loving Yahweh” or “one loved by Yahweh.” That would most certainly be an understanding of the name quite suitable for Our Lady.

(Reference: Kevin Knight, www.NewAdvent.org/cathen) Catholic Encyclopedia.

The most important question with respect to Mary’s name, however, is why did Anna and Joachim give Mary *that name*? Edward Healy Thompson in **The Life and Glories of St. Joseph**, pg. 105, says:

Her name, we cannot doubt, came from heaven, and was revealed to Joachim, who gave it to her on the eighth day after her birth.

Since salvation history shows that God Himself gave the names of those chosen for some special mission, does it not make sense, then, that Mary’s name should have come directly from God, for her mission as Theotokos was greater than any other creature’s mission on earth? In the New Testament the name of the Virgin Mary is generally *Mariam*, the archaic form, possibly used by the evangelists to distinguish Mary from others who bore the same name.

As seen in the meaning of Mary's name, the idea of sorrow and bitterness is well indicated. It was in 1239 A.D. that the 7 founders of the Servite Order took the Sorrows of Mary as the principal devotion of their order. The feast itself was established by the provincial synod of Cologne (1413) on the Friday after the third Sunday after Easter. It was to focus exclusively on Mary's sorrows during the crucifixion of Jesus, and was to expiate the crimes of the iconoclast Hussites. With time, the feast spread and enlarged its emphasis on Mary's other sorrows as well and was celebrated on various days in various places. By a Decree of Benedict XIII (April 22, 1727) the feast as "Septem dolorum B.M.V. was extended to the entire Latin Church and celebrated the Friday before Good Friday. A second feast was granted to the Servites in 1668 for the third Sunday in September and was extended to the Latin Church in 1814. In 1913 Pope Pius X moved the feast to September 15, the day after the Feast of the Holy Cross, as it is observed today. Different countries still celebrate Mary's sorrows in various ways on various days. The earlier feast the Friday before Palm Sunday was dropped in the Latin Church as a duplicate in 1969 and our celebration remains on September 15.

(Reference: Kevin Knight, www.NewAdvent.org/cathen) Catholic Encyclopedia.

While seven sorrows are picked for emphasis, Mary endured sorrows too numerous to mention. The seven we honor in particular are Simeon's prophecy that a sword would pierce Mary's own soul so that the thoughts of many might be revealed; the flight into Egypt; the loss of Jesus in the temple; the meeting with Jesus on the Way of the Cross; that horrendous crucifixion of Jesus; holding that bloodied, Sacred Body of Jesus on her lap after he was taken down from the cross, a sorrow memorialized with Michelangelo's great work of the Pieta; and the hasty burial without the desired preparation and time for Mary to grieve over her Son because it was the Sabbath.

In Mexico the custom arose to celebrate the dolors of Mary on the Friday before Good Friday. They build Altars of Compassion and Grief in homes and churches, altars they carry in the streets as people pray in honor of Mary's sorrows. Her statue is always accompanied by a cross as people remember the pain and sacrifice she shared so deeply as co-redeemer with Jesus in His Passion and death for our salvation. As family and friends gather around their altars in veneration, the traditional hymn we know so well, "Stabat Mater," written by Giacomone da Todi in 1306, is sung.

***At the Cross her station keeping,
Stood the mournful Mother weeping,
Close to Jesus to the last.
Is there one who would not weep
Whelmed in miseries so deep
Christ's dear Mother to behold?***

(Reference: Judy King, www.mexconnect.com/articles/1407-our-lady-of-the-sorrows)

Mary is certainly the greatest of all martyrs; she is Queen of Martyrs, Help of Christians, Co-redemptrix and Mediatrix of Grace. It is fitting that in our time the

Church honors Our Lady of Sorrows on the day after she celebrates the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Mary's Sorrows and Jesus' Passion are inextricably bound and are eternally and divinely interwoven in the fabric of Divine Mercy and Love.

In the book *Las Glorias de Maria* St. Alfonso Maria of Liguorio says Jesus revealed to Monica of Binasco these words:

I am very grateful for the tears shed for my passion, but since I love my mother intensely, the meditation on her sorrows at my death are extremely pleasing to me.

The Mother of God told her faithful servant, St. Bridget, with whose devotion to Our Lady's sorrows we are familiar, and who gives us the promises Our Lady made to those who promote devotion to her dolors:

No matter how numerous a person's sins may be, if he turns to me with a sincere purpose of amendment, I am prepared forthwith to receive him graciously, for I do not regard the number of sins he has committed, but look only upon the dispositions with which he comes to me; for I feel no aversion in healing his wounds, because I am called and am in truth the Mother of Mercy.

The promises Our Lady gives to those who meditate on her 7 sorrows (noted above) and say a Hail Mary on each is as follows: 1) I will grant peace to their families. 2) They will be enlightened about the divine mysteries. 3) I will console them in their pains and I will accompany them in their work. 4) I will grant them as much as they ask for as long as it does not oppose the adorable will of my divine Son or the sanctification of their souls. 5) I will defend them in their spiritual battles with the infernal enemy and I will protect them at every instant of their lives. 6) I will visibly help them at the moment of their death; they will see the face of their Mother. 7) I have obtained (This Grace) from my divine Son, that those who propagate this devotion to my tears and dolors will be taken directly from this earthly life to eternal happiness since all their sins will be forgiven and my Son and I will be their eternal consolation and joy.

(Our Lady of the Rosary Library promotional card, www.olrl.org)

How can we not, when meditating on Our Lady's sorrows and her words, not hear echoing in our hearts such similar cries and promises of "Our Lady of America®" to Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil:

Behold, O my children, the tears of your Mother! Shall I weep in vain? Assuage the sorrow of my Heart over the ingratitude of sinful men by the love and chasteness of your lives. Will you do this for me, beloved children, or will you allow your Mother to weep in vain?

(Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, Diary, "Our Lady of America®," Fostoria, Ohio, pg. 12)

O my sweet child, when will my desires be realized? My Immaculate Heart desires with great desire to see the kingdom of Jesus my Son established in all hearts. How I have pleaded with my children to open their hearts to Him, but most are cold and indifferent. Has ever a

mother shown more love and interest in her children's welfare than I have done? (Diary, pg. 17)

What am I to do, child of my heart, when my children turn from me? (Diary, pg. 18) Will you do as I wish at last, my children? (Diary, pg. 21)

Beloved daughter, you wonder at the sword and the deep wound it has made in my Heart. It is the sword of grief plunged therein by my children who refuse to let me teach them the true way. (Diary, pg. 23)

See, I weep, but my children show me no compassion. They behold the sword in my heart but will make no move to withdraw it. I give them love; they give me only ingratitude. Weep then, dear child, weep with your Mother over the sins of men. (Diary, pg. 34)

Will we give our dear Lady compassion and gratitude, or will we allow her to go on weeping in vain?

In accord with the Latin meaning of her name, Maris Stella, Star of the sea, Our Lady became the Star of hope and rescue on the high seas when many of her children were kidnapped and forced into slavery by pirates. In the 12th and 13th centuries these Barbary pirates from North Africa raided the coasts of Spain and Italy and went on into England and Ireland, going ashore to take many of the local people captive. Often the villages were burned to the ground. Being captured by these Moors became the fear of every coastal land. Many Christians sought to help their fellow imprisoned Christians who were being tormented by their captors in an effort to get them to deny the Faith. It was at this time that St. Peter Nolasco lived. At age 25 he took a vow of chastity and turned over his huge wealth to the Church for works of mercy and the ransom of Christians. He went to Barcelona, Spain to work in the court of young King James. It is said Our Lady appeared to the king, to Peter and his confessor on the same day. Our Lady appeared to Peter holding two bags of money to use as ransom money for captive Christians and instructed him to start an order for this purpose. She also appeared showing him the white habit for the order. Thus in 1223 the Mercedarian Order, dedicated to Our Lady of Mercy, was established. St. Peter was the first superior and was also the Ransomer, the one sent into lands held by the Moors to arrange for the ransom of prisoners. The holy founder died in 1256. These monks would willingly offer themselves into slavery to free other Christian captives.

Kevin Knight - <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10197b.htm>

By this work of mercy...all the brothers of this Order, as sons of true obedience, must always be gladly disposed to give up their lives, if it is necessary, as Jesus Christ gave up His for us (this is known as the Fourth Vow of the Order, in addition to poverty, chastity and obedience.)

Fr. Nicholas Schofield - <http://romanmiscellany.blogspot.com/2006/09/our-lady-of-ransom.html>

In time a feast was added to the Roman calendar to honor Our Lady of Mercy, Our Lady of Ransom on September 24, mindful that Our Lady ransoms all of us out of

the slavery to sin and into freedom and true conversion. The Mercedarian Order's original name was the 'Order of the Virgin Mary of Mercy of the Redemption of Captives of St. Eulalia' (an early martyr venerated in Barcelona). Christopher Columbus would later bring members of this order to the New World and establish religious houses in much of Latin America and Mexico.

How dearly we need such devotion to help our fellow Christians being persecuted in non-Christian countries today. How dearly we need such devotion to free ourselves from the prison of pride and sin that hold our souls captive. Here again we see "Our Lady of America®" as that merciful Mother, always weeping for us, her poor children, and seeking new ways to bring hope and rescue to us on the stormy high seas of our journey home to God. Maris Stella. Star of the sea! It is this same Mary who becomes our constant companion on our journey when she makes this pledge to Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, and through her, to us:

**Have confidence, dear one, I am your Mother and will never leave you.
(Diary, pg. 46)**

It is this same Mother of Mercy who begs us to offer prayer and sacrifice in atonement for our sins and as a ransom for the sins of others. She begs us:

**Help me save those who will not save themselves. Help me bring
once again the sunshine of God's peace upon the world. (Diary, Pg. 15)**

We see this message of mercy made so clear to Sister Mildred as she recounts Our Lady's appearance as "Mother of Mercy" in her May 15, 1957 letter.

Our Lady showed herself to me today as the Mother of Mercy. With her arms extended, her blue mantle affording a safe refuge for the sinner, she said: "I am the Mother of Mercy. Under my mantle I will hide my children. The justice of God will not reach them if they seek refuge 'neath the protection of my mercy. My Son gives to me all those souls who come to me with confidence, calling upon my aid. Their salvation is in my hands. I will obtain for them the necessary graces to save their souls.

Come to me, poor, suffering and frightened ones. I am your Mother. Never will I forsake you. Only come to me with a wholehearted and loving trust. Place your souls into my keeping. I am that faithful Mother who never forsakes her children. Honor me by your confidence and love. This I desire and ask of you my poor children. Do not deny the wishes of your Mother.

My sweet child, hold yourself in readiness, for I will teach you a most efficacious prayer addressed to me as the Mother of Mercy.

Prayer to the Mother of Mercy

Oh Holy Virgin, Mother of Mercy, look down in compassion upon your poor, frightened children. We come to you with fullest confidence, oh Refuge of the afflicted and distressed. Where shall we fly, or to whom shall we go but to you, oh Mother of Mercy. Our cause is in your hands. Cover us then, we beseech you, with the saving mantle of your tender compassion. Hide us under the cloak of your loving care and pity, from the just punishments of an angry God. Shield us from the chastisements which we, by our many sins and transgressions, have justly drawn upon ourselves.

Be to us, oh comforter of the lonely and sorrowful, a Mother of Mercy, never leaving us either in life or in death. Under the mantle of your protecting mercy, oh loving Mother, lead us to the feet of your all-merciful Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, to remain there forever. Amen.

“I am that faithful Mother who never forsakes her children!”

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