

Behold, Your Mother

A Pilgrimage of Faith with Our Lady of Sorrows





“From this day all generations will call me blessed.”

Introduction

Visit any parish church and you will find images of the Blessed Mother. At Our Lady of Sorrows, 16 grace our French Gothic, built by the architects who designed the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., largest pilgrimage destination in North America. Like her big sister, Our Lady of Sorrows resounds with spirit and life, her medieval majesty evoking the swells of the heavenly chorus, her Arts and Crafts handiwork reprising creation's hymn of praise on earth, voices that echo down the centuries, celebrating the time an angel startled shepherds with tidings of great joy, a "lowly handmaid" found favor with the Lord Most High, God's Son stooped down to raise us up as children of God, and heaven and earth began singing in harmony once again.

Confident that Our Lady of Sorrows can instill in us a deeper harmony too, "Behold, Your Mother" invites you on a pilgrimage in the company of two persons, one human, the other divine, whose hearts, one immaculate, the other sacred, will come to beat in concert, a spiritual journey filled with hopes and fears, joys and tears, walking by faith and not by sight, discovering in Mary how your heart was created to beat the same as her son's.



“For he has remembered his promise of mercy.”

Step One

The Paschal Mystery

An imposing facade towers above, a reminder of God's majesty, greater than any of us can imagine, beyond our ability to comprehend, while immediately overhead Mary and John, the Beloved Disciple, stand beside Jesus. God, so beyond us, it seems, has not only drawn near, he has taken our place on a cross of pain. Below the Crucifixion scene, carved in Latin, a line from the "*Stabat Mater*" reads, "Who is the man who would not weep, 'whelmed in miseries so deep, Christ's dear mother to behold?" while in a Latin inscription higher up St. Paul exhorts us to "glory in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Our Lady of Sorrows, as I accompany you in this church dedicated to your name, venerating you in stained glass, carved oak, and chiseled limestone, accompany me in my life journey, assuring that I remain close by Jesus to the last. Like St. John, who on hearing Our Lord's revelation at Calvary, "Behold, your mother," welcomed you into his heart, may Christ's treasured gift to his disciples assure me the love, care, and guidance of the one who brought God's Son into the world in Bethlehem, revealed his power and mission at Cana, shared in his supreme sacrifice at Calvary, and, with motherly concern for all his faithful ones, implored the Spirit as she awaited the coming of her mystical Spouse at Pentecost.



“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.”

Step Two

Mary Held by Her Mother, St. Ann

The divine artist, it seems, wished to create his redemptive masterpiece far from public view. That could explain why Our Lady, shown in the embrace of St. Ann, grew up in Nazareth, a tiny town never mentioned in the Old Testament. Still, no one would better embody what Jesus came to accomplish, from conception marked by a goodness not seen since man's fall, the lilies her mother displays a symbol of innocence, the green of her robe hope of our rebirth. Years before receiving God's Living Word in your womb, Mary, you press God's inspired word to your heart, a heart St. Ann taught to say yes, warning what befell us when Adam and Eve said no, yet affirming Yahweh's constant love and the promise of a Messiah who would scatter the proud in their conceit, vanquishing the sower of evil in the garden. Your sweet face we see but not the beauty within, where a desire is forming to ponder God's word so as to respond to it with abandon, to trust completely though comprehending only a little, your every thought "an engagement for the future," in the words of Bishop Sheen. This quiet but steady growth is a good thing, for the times of deciding and doing, of wonder and woe, will arrive soon enough.

Mary Immaculate, in whom Old and New Covenants are wed, most fair and most faithful Daughter of Zion and image of the Church without spot or wrinkle, foster in me a childlike trust like yours, God's greatest work of art a reminder Christian perfection begins with knowing he is the potter, I am the clay, formed to be supple and responsive to the Master's touch.



“My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

Step Three

Mary's Presentation

In the gracing of man and woman, the Holy Spirit, descending as a dove, has never been more engaged, Mary, responsiveness to his gifts intensifying your desire to manifest God's goodness through loving surrender. St. Joachim and St. Ann accompany you as the temple priest in Jerusalem welcomes into God's service not merely a child but, even now, the loved one who must love requite. Though you and your parents never have lived apart, St. Ann encourages you with a gentle touch of her hand, certain you have been too blessed not to seek out the cause of your blessedness, trusting that God's promises will come to fruition through her little girl. Inspired by this confidence, Mary, you do not look back, your goodness, genuine as pure gold, to prove more precious when tried in the furnace of affliction, your surrender, fertile ground for the Spirit, to replace Israel's old Ark of the Covenant with the Living Ark of the Covenant, and the desert manna the old ark contained with the Living Manna that makes all things new. In years to come you will present the fruit of your womb in offering as St. Ann did, only in your case twice. On that second occasion, Jesus also will refuse to look back, arms outstretched and feet positioned to receive a hammer's blows.

House of Gold and Cause of Our Joy, whose sanctity and merits found favor with the Father, lead me in the practice of humble submission as the pathway to perfection, of openness as my highway to happiness, avoiding the temptation to grasp for virtue's rewards, becoming in this way a temple where the Holy Spirit dwells, prepared to place on God's altar the gift of selfless love.



“For he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.”

Step Four

The Annunciation

Viewed from outside the church, these stained-glass windows appear unremarkable. Only on venturing inside are we transfixed by their colors, particularly blue, symbol of grace and purity. High above the tabernacle, the clearest of blues sparkle in benediction as God, drawn to a soul's grace-filled radiance, dispatches Gabriel with a startling proposal. "How can this be?" wonders the young virgin, eyes restrained, hands folded, head slightly bowed. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you," the angel confides. Evidence that you are by heaven's own account "full of grace," Mary, betrothed to the Spirit even before now, swift yet serene in following his promptings, your virginity now fidelity's seal, appears in the glow of your face, a mirror of God's love, its moon-like luster reflecting the one true light, and, again, in an unmarked book visible at your side, the blank pages urging him to write as he wills. No wonder the one who plumbs the heart, seeing in humility the antidote to Satan's pride, and in a new Eve the cure for the first Eve's curse, will entrust to you his only begotten Son, Word made flesh of your flesh, our Savior's meekness foreshadowed in God's lowly handmaid, Christ's zeal to do the Father's will echoed in your "let it be," that final, heavenly vow the powers of hell will test.

O Virgin of Virgins and Bride of the Spirit, whose fiat involved no change of heart, you being wholehearted from the start, guard me under your mantle from temptation, selfishness, and pride, empowering my "yes" to God, a humble, obedient, and ever-faithful "let it be," having taught your child that even a marriage made in heaven requires the consent of both parties.



“He has come to the help of his servant Israel.”

Step Five

Visit of the Magi

The lowly handmaid has found favor, and through her “let it be” so have we, you bringing heaven so near, Mary, that all generations will call you blessed, never a birth more joy-filled, yet not completely so for the Mother of God. In the background a luxurious wrapping is draped over a feeding trough, the fruit of your obedient faith being both glorious and lowly born, able to take the part of mortal sinners that they might share in his eternal glory. To mark the Nativity, Magi arrive from the East bearing gifts, including myrrh, an oil for burial, recalling your first sorrow, Simeon’s prophecy of a new bond between Jesus and the one St. Augustine said “gave milk to our Bread,” widening your maternal embrace through an exchange of hardship. This dolor will be followed by a long flight to exile with an infant at the breast; losing your child in a Jerusalem packed with pilgrims; the grief-stricken encounter on the road to Calvary; Christ’s suffering and Crucifixion with you by his side; holding Our Lord’s lashed, lanced, and lifeless body in your arms, and the sealed tomb’s final separation of son and mother. Even as these seven sorrows unite you more and more to the mission of Jesus, submission to God’s will and contemplation of his love never let joy fall victim to sorrow, just as sorrow directed toward your Son never succumbs to sadness directed toward yourself.

Virgin most amiable, whose immaculate heart, though pierced, preserves its capacity to love, instill in me the virtues that lead you to the cross, the tree of life, enabling me to accompany your Son too, entering into Christ’s Passion with my mother, every joy and every sorrow offered through him, with him, and in him, no step of my life’s pilgrimage without eternal worth.



“He has shown the strength of his arm.”

Step Six

Jesus Meets His Mother

Our Lord asks each of us to take up our cross and follow him, but in your case, Mary, that cross was most identical to the one Christ bore. Look no farther than the fourth sorrow, along the *Via Dolorosa*, where, if only for a moment, mutual abandonment to God's will has brought you close, your arms straining to console your son, his torment imaged on your face, a living Veronica's veil, the Suffering Servant reflected in his most human likeness, a participatory self-emptying that plunges you into the heart of the divine sacrifice, portrait of a shared agony. Though bloodied, beaten, and burdened by the weight of our sins, Jesus reaches out to relieve a mother's anguish. In the briefest encounter, the barest caress, the power of sacrificial love is confirmed, a power that transforms pain into passion when we cling to our Savior as members of his Body.

Our Lady of Sorrows, always able to recognize the God who humbles himself, help me to see Christ imaged in the suffering face of the Church as we enter into the Paschal mystery, submitting to the Father's will in my life, not lamenting its unavoidable burdens, accompanying Christ even in the darkest hour, realizing great acts of love are borne through sacrifice, the cross that he carried mine to share and his love for sinners countenanced in me, my compassion never kept at arm's length.



“He has scattered the proud in their conceit.”

Step Seven

Our Lord's Death and Deposition

In the fifth sorrow, Mary, you remain standing, though your head is bowed and your eyes downcast, agony yielding to grief after Jesus has given up his spirit, a thrust lance leaving no doubt. As John's Gospel testifies, the mother who conceived God's Son in her womb, fed her little one on Scripture, found the boy who had been lost, and sprang the Savior on mission appears now as a Tower of Ivory veiled in lowliness, slipping silently like Judith past enemy lines, a sharer in the saving mystery, woven from thorns this crown of victory, Christ's heart and yours pierced in sacred union. In the 13th station, having drunk his chalice to the dregs, your child crucified, your God rejected, you press the Savior's limp hand against your cheek before the body is taken down. Likewise, before breathing his last Our Lord reached out, the New Adam embracing the New Eve, the words "Woman, behold, your son" turning inconceivable torment into birth pangs, the distress of a mother in labor, a spiritual maternity that stretches across time, Fr. Michael Gaitley writes, one in which Jesus, our orphaned state passing, "brings us closer to himself by giving us to the one closest to him," refusing to lay down his life until we were given you, a mother so attentive to human needs, as when the wine ran out at Cana.

Mater Dolorosa, unwilling to abandon your son or to forsake me, there being no unbelief in you, deepen my faith each Eucharist as we return to Calvary, where the human soul rediscovers its worth and what was cut off by sin now can flow freely, able to pardon as I am pardoned, renewed by the Bread of Life that is broken to be shared and by your Cana request answered beyond measure, Christ "the first-born of many brothers and sisters," blood and water from his side a font of love outpoured, the Savior's arms extended wide, in yours my hope secure.



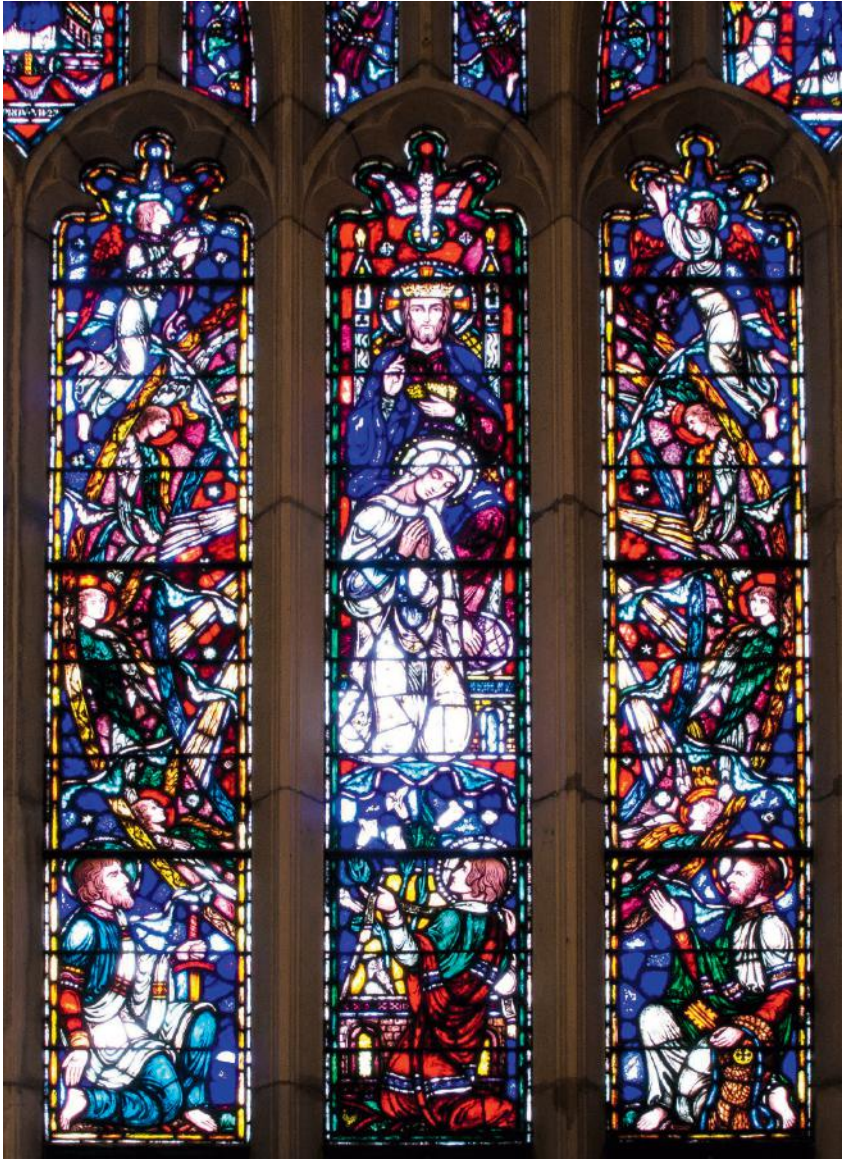
“He has cast down the mighty from their thrones.”

Step Eight

Mary Holds the Body of Christ

In a replica of Michelangelo's study in marble, a meditation on the sixth sorrow, you who gave us the newborn Savior cradle him one last time, the virgin who bore the Word made flesh offers us redemption by his bodily sacrifice. Even as your embrace expresses profound mourning, especially knowing that your son's entombment, the final sorrow, must come quickly, the same caress manifests that love to the point of brokenness which makes us whole, the one, eternal sacrifice renewed on the altar, your right hand veiled out of reverence, your left inviting us to receive, to draw as near as our mother did, not simply alive in Christ but Christ alive in us, a foretaste of heavenly bliss.

In the divine wisdom it was ordained that each of us enter this world knowing a mother's love. Seeing how good it is, and how it was best exemplified, Divine Providence saw fit that Mary become our heavenly mother, each person benefiting as Christ did during his earthly stay and on his way back to the Father. Our Lady of Sorrows, loving truly and truly loving, as this sacred mystery reveals itself in my life may the call of adoption, first conferred with labored breath, sound readily in my ears, entrusting you to me and me to you, our Savior the glue, that I might behold a joyful mother surrendering her will to God and my eternal good, a sorrowful mother providing her child sure refuge during time of woe, a fearless mother standing by her crucified son to crush the serpent's head, a grace-filled mother leading me to Our Lord's pierced side and the font of all grace, a perfect mother drawing me closer to Christ the closer I draw to her, and a prayerful mother keeping vigil till the hour when she welcomes me home.



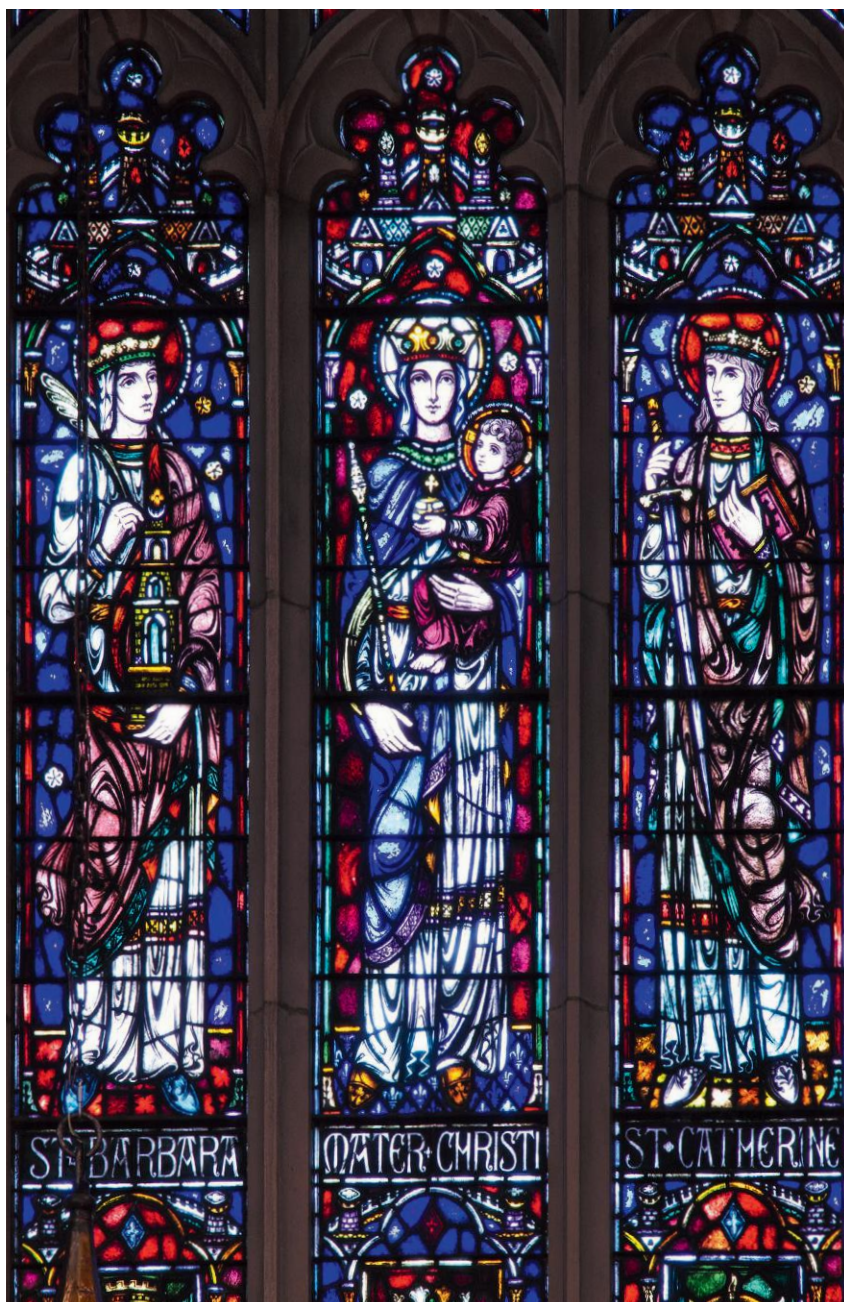
“The Almighty has done great things for me.”

Step Nine

Mary's Coronation

In the final glorious mystery, Christ the King enthrones his white-robed queen, immaculately conceived by his grace, now more totally conformed to him, the wondrous event celebrated by a whirling circle of angels, apostles and doctors of the Church. Your call to share in Our Lord's reign over sin and death fills us with wonder and awe, Mary, followed by joy and jubilation knowing that God has treated *Regina Caeli's* children like royalty too, creating us in his image and likeness and at Baptism adopting us, also robed in white, our birthright the same as our queen's, these eternal bonds born of faith, not of flesh, Christ revealing this truth to his disciples and providing in our mother faith's greatest model. For what is your enthronement if not proof God will "cast down the mighty from their thrones but lift up the lowly" and what is your royal crown if not assurance our crown of righteousness awaits?

Queen at the right hand of the King, who bore the Savior in time and reigns with him eternally, our living pledge that death is swallowed up by his victory over the grave and that grief is turned into joy "no one will take away," invoking you under your title of Our Lady of Sorrows and inspired by your fidelity and fortitude, may each cross I bear, its merits Christ's Body to share, help me reach heaven's heights, the Calvary I climb my pathway to joy, that I might experience the one privilege you sought during your humble pilgrimage of faith, to glory in the Lord, caught up with you body and soul in loving communion, the life of the Trinity, where you will always remain beloved daughter of the Father, beloved mother of the Son, and beloved Bride of the Spirit.



ST BARBARA

MATER CHRISTI

ST CATHERINE

‘By the cross of our salvation/
Mary stood in desolation/
While the Savior hung above/
All her human powers failing,/

Sorrow’s sword, at last prevailing,/

Stabs and breaks her heart of love.../

Virgin Mary, full of sorrow,/

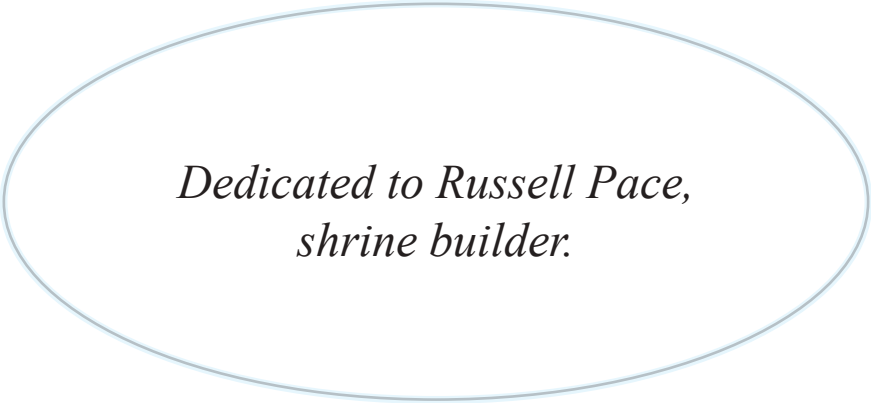
From your love I ask to borrow/
Love enough to share your pain./

Make my heart to burn with fire,/

Make Christ’s love my own desire,/

Who for love of me was slain.’

- From the *Stabat Mater*



*Dedicated to Russell Pace,
shrine builder.*

Complimentary copies free with group pilgrimage.

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