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Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows

Date: Monday, September 15, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: 1 Timothy 2:1–8
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 28:2, 7–9 | **Response:** Psalm 28:6
Gospel Acclamation: God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him might have eternal life.
Gospel Reading: Luke 2:33–35 (Proper)
Preached at: the Chapel of Emmaus House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe**.**

The readings today are about the wideness of God's mercy, the weight of human suffering, and the mysterious way the two meet at the foot of the Cross. In the first reading from the First Letter to Timothy, St Paul urges prayers "for everyone — for kings and all in authority" so that we may live in peace. This was not mere diplomacy. In the Roman Empire, where emperor worship was proof of civic loyalty, Christians were suspect, exempt neither by tradition nor by law as the Jews were. To pray for the emperor was not to approve his rule but to declare that no one, not even the most powerful, is beyond God's desire to save. Paul roots this not in politics but in the person of Christ, who "gave himself as a ransom for all" — language that evoked the freeing of slaves and the redemption of family from crushing debt. The Cross is not a transaction for a chosen few, but an open gate for the whole world.

The psalmist today cries, "Blessed be the Lord, for he has heard my cry for mercy". Here is the other half of Paul's vision: God is not only the Lord of the nations, but the Shepherd who bends low to hear the trembling voice of one soul. The psalm shifts from plea to praise, from "hear the voice of my supplication" to "the Lord is my strength and my shield." In that change we glimpse the trust of one who knows that God listens, even when the waiting feels like an endless night. For the people of Zimbabwe today, who pray for justice amid economic strain, political uncertainty, and the ache of emigration that empties villages of their youth, this psalm is a prayer for survival. It teaches us to cry out and to keep crying out, because the Shepherd still hears.

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The proper Gospel from Luke brings us to the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. Simeon, in the Temple, blesses the infant Jesus and tells Mary that her child will be "a sign that will be opposed… and a sword will pierce your own soul too." Mary's heart would be wounded not by one blow but by a lifetime of seeing her Son misunderstood, resisted, betrayed, and crucified. This is not the wound of hopelessness but the wound of love — the love that stays when it would be easier to leave, that holds vigil at the foot of the Cross. Rabbinical tradition saw the heart as the seat of both thought and will; a pierced heart was one torn between what it knows to be true and what it cannot yet see fulfilled. Mary's faith never closed its eyes to the cost of God's plan.

If we stand with Mary in imaginative prayer, as Ignatius invites, we might feel the cold stone of the Temple floor, hear the cooing of doves in their cages, and sense the unease of a young mother hearing such words over her newborn. What would it be like to carry that prophecy for thirty years? What happens in our own hearts when God's promises come wrapped in pain?

Mary's Seven Sorrows form a map of discipleship: not a straight path of glory, but a winding road of fidelity. The first three — Simeon's prophecy, the flight into Egypt, and the loss of the boy Jesus — are all shadows cast across moments of joy. They teach us that the brightest blessings are never untouched by sorrow. Even at the manger, the shadow of the Cross lengthens across the straw. And yet, each grief is somehow a grace. As St John Paul II reminded us, suffering, when united to Christ, becomes not defeat but offering — a way to join Christ in his redemptive love.

The last four sorrows — meeting Jesus on the way to Calvary, standing beneath the Cross, receiving his broken body, and laying him in the tomb — call us not only to weep, but to remain. To stay. To endure. Pope Benedict XVI as Cardinal Ratzinger once reflected that while the disciples fled, Mary stood. She did not understand everything, but she remembered the angel's word: *Do not be afraid.* And so she stayed — not with answers, but with her faithful presence. That is real courage. That is the faith that Christ looks for even now: a faith that does not run from suffering but remains near it, tends to it, and cradles the brokenness of the world in quiet hope.

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Today we also remember the seven holy men of Florence who, almost eight hundred years ago, experienced a shared vision of Mary and answered her call to "leave the world, the better to serve almighty God." From their simplicity was born the Order of the Servants of Mary — the Servites — who took as their charism the contemplation of Mary's sorrows, not to wallow in sadness, but to discover in her wounds a way of love. They taught the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows, the *Via Matris*, the Way of the Mother. They saw in Mary not only the one who bore the Word made flesh, but the woman who bore the cost of that Word in her flesh. In her silence, they heard strength. In her tears, they saw wisdom. In her sorrows, they found a school of compassion.

We, too, are being called — not to flee the world, but to love it differently. To love it as Mary did: not with illusion, but with fidelity; not by escaping sorrow, but by staying close to those who suffer. Catholic Social Teaching tells us the measure of a society is how it treats the most vulnerable — the same ones who were always close to Mary's heart: the refugee, the mother fleeing violence, the child lost in a crowd, the condemned and crucified poor. The Servites understood that to meditate on Mary's sorrows is to be drawn, inevitably, to the suffering Christ in the streets, in the prisons, in the waiting rooms of the world.

Our Lady of Sorrows stands as both mirror and map for the Church. She shows us what it means to receive the world's brokenness into our own hearts without letting it harden us. In her silence at Calvary, she teaches the eloquence of faithful presence; in her courage, she teaches us that the pierced heart is the heart most open to resurrection.

So let us go from here with a renewed commitment to pray widely, trust deeply, and love steadfastly. For the sword that pierced Mary's soul is not the end of the story; it is the wound through which the light of Easter enters.

For our prayer this morning:

- In whom do I find it most difficult to see Christ — and what would it mean to begin praying for that person every day?
- Where in my life am I being invited to trust God's hearing before I see God's answer?
- How can I, like Mary, stay present to another's suffering without rushing to fix it or flee from it?

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.