

Sept 15 Monday: (Our Lady of Sorrows): Jn 19: 25-27 or Lk 2: 33-35: Today we remember the spiritual martyrdom of the Mother of Jesus and her suffering with the sufferings of her Divine Son. Mary is the Queen of martyrs because she went through spiritual torments greater than the bodily agonies of the martyrs and offered her sorrows to God for our sake. The principal Biblical references to Mary's sorrows are in Luke 2:35 and John 19: 26-27. Many early Church writers interpret the sword prophesied by Simeon as Mary's sorrows, especially as she saw Jesus die on the cross. In the past, the Church celebrated two feasts to commemorate separately 1) the spiritual martyrdom of the Blessed Virgin Mary throughout her life as the mother of Jesus and 2) her compassion for her Divine Son during his suffering and death. The devotion to the seven dolors (sorrows) of Mary honors her for the motherly sufferings she endured during the whole life of Jesus on earth.

In 1239 the seven founders of the Servite Order took up the sorrows of Mary who stood under the Cross as the main devotion of their religious Order. Originally, this day was kept on the Friday before Good Friday. It was Pope Pius XII who changed the date of the feast to the 15th of September immediately after the feast of the Triumph of the Cross. The nineteenth-century German mystic Anne Catherine Emmerich claimed to have received a vision in which Mary actually kisses the blood of Jesus in the many sacred places on the way of the cross. In his film, *The Passion of the Christ*, Mel Gibson was inspired by this vision and pictures Claudia, Pontius Pilate's wife, secretly handing Mary cloths to collect the blood of Jesus from the streets of Jerusalem.

The seven sorrows: There are seven times of great suffering in Mary's life. These events remind many parents of their personal family experiences of sorrow and mourning for their dear children. 1) The prophecy of Simeon, 2) The flight into Egypt, 3) The loss of the Child Jesus at Jerusalem, 4) Meeting Jesus on the road to Calvary, 5) The standing at the foot of the Cross, 6) The descent of Jesus from the Cross, and 7) The burial of Jesus.

Life message: 1) On this feast day let us pray for those who continue to endure similar sufferings that they may receive from God the strength that they desperately need to continue to carry their spiritual crosses. 2) Let us try to enter into the sorrowing hearts of the mothers in Iraq and the mothers in the United States and other countries grieving for their children, soldiers and civilians alike. 3) Let us also remember with repentant hearts that it is our sins which caused the suffering of Jesus and Mary. ["At the cross her station keeping, Stood the mournful mother weeping, Close to Jesus to the last. Through her heart, his sorrow sharing, All his bitter anguish bearing, Now at length the sword has passed." (Stabat Mater)]

Sept 16 Tuesday: Lk 7: 11-17: 11 Soon afterward he went to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. 12 As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her. 13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." 14 And he came and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." 15 And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother. 16 Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" 17 And this report concerning him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

The context: Today's Gospel presents one of the three stories in the Gospel where Jesus brings a dead person back to life. The other stories are those of Lazarus and of the daughter of Jairus, the synagogue leader. Today's story is found only in Luke. Nain is a village six miles SE of Nazareth, and it is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible. The scene is particularly sad because the mother in this story, who had already lost her husband, has now lost her only son and her only means of support.

Jesus' touch of human kindness: Jesus was visibly moved by the sight of the weeping widow, perhaps because he could foresee his own mother in the same position at the foot of his cross. His compassionate heart prompted him to console the widow saying: "Do not weep." Then Luke reports, "He touched the bier and when the bearers stood still, he said, 'Young man, I say to you, arise.' And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother," and participated in her indescribable joy. There were instances in the Old Testament of people being raised from death: by Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24), and Elisha (2 Kings 4:32-37). Jesus' miracle took place near the spot where the prophet Elisha had brought another mother's son back to life again (see 2 Kings 4:18-37). These miracles were signs of the power of God working through His prophets. In the case of the widow's son in today's Gospel, the miracle showed the people that Jesus, like Elijah and Elisha, was, at the least, a great prophet.

Life messages: 1) St. Augustine compares the joy of that widow to the joy of our Mother the Church when her sinful children return to the life of grace: "Our Mother the Church rejoices every day when people are raised again in spirit."

2) The event also reminds us to have the same love and compassion for those who suffer that Jesus had.

Sept 17 Wednesday: Lk 7: 31-35: 31 "To what then shall I compare the men of this generation, and what are they like? 32 They are like children sitting in the market place and calling to one another, 'We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep.' 33 For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine; and you say, 'He has a demon.' 34 The Son of man has come eating and drinking; and you say, 'Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' 35 Yet wisdom is justified by all her children."

The context: The message of John the Baptist and the message of Jesus fell on deaf ears and met with stiff resistance from the Scribes and the Pharisees because of their pride, jealousy, prejudice and spiritual blindness. Hence, they attributed the austerities of John the Baptist to the devil and saw Jesus' table fellowship with sinners as evidence against his being the Messiah. In today's Gospel, Jesus compares these Scribes and Pharisees with irresponsible street-children.

Dog-in-the-manger attitude: Jesus compares the attitude of the Scribes and the Pharisees with that of street-children who want to entertain themselves by acting out wedding and funeral songs. They divide themselves into two groups. But when one group proposes to sing wedding songs and asks the other group to dance, the second group will refuse, proposing funeral songs instead, and asking the first group to act as a funeral procession, carrying one of them on their shoulders. In the end both groups will be frustrated. Jesus states that the Scribes and Pharisees act exactly like these irresponsible and immature children because of their pride and prejudice. Jesus criticizes the unbelieving Jews for not listening

either to John the Baptist, who preached a message of austerity and repentance, or to Jesus, who preached the Good News of love, mercy and salvation.

Life messages: 1) Jesus' parable about disappointed playmates challenges us to examine whether we have selective hearing, so that we hear only what we want to hear. Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God is Good News and it produces true joy and spiritual freedom for those who will listen, but it is also a warning for those who refuse to listen and close their minds. 2) Hearing the Gospel implies the total acceptance and assimilation of what we hear and the incorporation of it into our daily lives.

3) Like the generation of Jesus' time, our age is marked by indifference and contempt, especially in regard to the things of Heaven. Indifference dulls our ears to God's voice and to the Good News of the Gospel. Only the humble of heart can find joy and favor in God's grace.

Sept 18 Thursday: Luke 7: 36-50: 36 One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house, and took his place at table. 37 And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, 38 and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." 40 And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "What is it, Teacher?" 41 ...43 .....

The context: The central theme of today's Gospel is an invitation to repent, do penance and renew our lives instead of carrying the heavy baggage of our sins. It celebrates the gift of God's forgiveness. Our God is a God Who always tries, not to punish, but to rehabilitate, so that we may be made whole and experience inner peace and harmony.

The sinner at the feet of Jesus: The Gospel story tells of a woman of the street who washes Jesus' feet with her tears, wipes them with her hair, and perfumes them with costly oil. On the other hand, the host, Simon the Pharisee, has purposely omitted these Jewish customs of welcoming a guest. When one invited a Rabbi to one's house, it was normal to place one's hand on his shoulder and give him the kiss of peace, to bathe his feet (Palestine is a very dusty country), and to burn a grain of incense or put a drop of attar of roses on his head. Jesus contrasts Simon's rudeness with the prostitute's public expression of repentance and says that her sins are forgiven because of her love. By telling the short parable of the two debtors, Christ teaches us three things--his own Divinity and his power to forgive sins; the merit the woman's love deserves; and the discourtesy implied in Simeon's neglecting to receive Jesus in the conventional way.

Life messages: 1) We can accept or reject the mercy of God: We are challenged to accept or reject the mercy of God. We often share Simon's mentality by displaying an attitude of lovelessness and harshness. We have to love Jesus because he is the one and only Savior who has died for our sins 2) We need to be grateful to our forgiving God: Our serious attempts to avoid the occasions of sin will be both the proof of our sincere repentance and the expression of our gratitude to the merciful God who has forgiven our sins. 3) We need to cultivate a forgiving attitude towards our neighbor: Although it is not

easy, we must learn to forgive those who hurt us if we want to be able to receive the daily forgiveness we need from a merciful God.

Sept 19 Friday: Luke 8: 1-3: 1 Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, 2 and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, 3 and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

The context: Today's Gospel describes how Jesus began his preaching and healing ministry in the company of his twelve Apostles and a group of women volunteers. Luke's Gospel pays special attention to women. The female following of Jesus was out of the ordinary at the time and place where Jesus lived. In those days, strict rabbis would not speak to a woman in public, and very strict ones would not speak to their own wives in the streets or public places. Luke describes several women in his Gospel, like Mary's kinswoman, Elizabeth, the prophetess Anna, the sinful woman, Martha and Mary, the crippled woman, the woman with hemorrhage, and, in the parables, the woman kneading yeast into the dough, the woman with the lost coin and the woman who tamed the judge.

The ministry and the associates: Jesus started preaching the "Good News" that God His Father is not a judging and punishing God but a loving and forgiving God Who wants to save mankind through His Son Jesus. Luke mentions the names of a few women who helped Jesus' ministry by their voluntary service and financial assistance. A few among them were rich and influential like Joanna, the wife of King Herod's steward Chuza. Some others like Mary of Magdala were following Jesus to express their gratitude for the healing they had received from Jesus. It was a mixture of different types of women volunteers who were attracted by the person and message of Jesus. They supported the work of proclaiming the Gospel by providing food and other material assistance to Jesus and the Apostles who proclaimed the Gospel by word and deed and by their communal and shared life. At crucial moments, Jesus was better served by his women disciples than by his men.

Life message: The evangelization work of the Church needs the preaching of the missionaries and preachers, feeding and leading the believers in parishes, and the active support of all Christians by their transparent Christian lives, fervent prayers and financial assistance.

Sept 20 Saturday: Luke 8: 4-15: 4 And when a great crowd came together and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: 5 "A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell along the path, and was trodden under foot, and the birds of the air devoured it. 6 And some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. 7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns grew with it and choked it. 8 And some fell into good soil and grew, and yielded a hundredfold." As he said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." 9 And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, 10 he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand. 11 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 12 The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, that they may not believe and be saved. 13 And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy; but these have no root, they believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. 14 And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.

The context: Today's Gospel passage gives us the parable of the sower, the seeds sown, and the yield depending upon the type of soil. It is the first parable of Jesus in the New Testament about the Kingdom of Heaven. It is also a parable interpreted by Jesus himself. This parable was intended as a warning to the hearers to be attentive and to the apostles to be hopeful about Jesus' preaching in the face of growing opposition to Jesus and his ideas. The sower is God, the Church, the parents, the teachers. The seed sown is the high-yielding word of God which is "a sharp sword" (Is. 49: 2), "two-edged sword" (Heb 4: 12), and "fire and hammer" (Jer 23:29). Soil type & the yield: The hardened soil on the footpath represents people with minds closed because of laziness, pride, prejudice or fear. The soil on flat rock pieces represents emotional types of people who go after novelties without sticking to anything and are unwilling to surrender their wills to God. "I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 11:19). The soil filled with weeds represents people addicted to evil habits and evil tendencies and those whose hearts are filled with hatred, jealousy or the greed that makes them interested only in acquiring money by any means and in enjoying life in any way possible. The good and fertile soil represents well-intentioned people with open minds and clean hearts, earnest in hearing the word and zealous in putting it into practice. Zacchaeus, the sinful woman and the thief on Jesus' right side, St. Augustine, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Francis Xavier among others, fall into this category of the good soil.

Life message: Let us become the good soil and produce hundred-fold yields by earnestly hearing, faithfully assimilating and daily cultivating the word of God we have received, so that the Holy Spirit may produce His fruits in our lives.