Celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows

and of the 175th anniversary of the foundation

of the feminine branch of Holy Cross

Saint-Laurent, September 15, 2016

Reflection

I began writing this reflection one month ago, on the 15th of August on the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, feast which reminds us of her passage from Nazareth, her earthly life to an eternal life. Before she could make this passage, she lived a whole life on earth, a life strewn with joys, challenges and sorrow.

When I was a young sister, I participated in a 30-day retreat inNominingue.

During the retreat, while I was trying to define my devotion to Mary, beyond the rosary and the month of Mary, I asked my Director what he could tell me about Mary. He simply answered; “Mary is always present”.

Robert Lebel, a composer of French religious songs, has the same intuition. He composed some litanies of Mary in which he sings, O, Mary, Our Lady of Everywhere (*Ô Marie, Notre-Dame de Partout*). Mary was always there

in Jesus’ life, from his conception until the time of his death.

Scriptures present Mary in the following scenes:

* At the wedding at Cana : she saves the day for the hosts
* Or again, when Jesus’ family came to speak to him…he answered “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers… whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mt. 12, 48-50) In fact, Mary had not done Jesus’ will at the wedding, nor her own, but the will of the Father.
* We can suppose that Mary, as Jesus, discovered little by little her role as Mother, as mother of the Saviour, something unforeseen which she had to deal with. It is gradually, that she understood that she was Our Lady of Everywhere!
* A touching scene in the Gospel is that of Mary at the foot of the cross with other women and John, the beloved disciple. We will return to this scene later…
* And Mary was there at Pentecost; with others she experienced the birth of the Church, to receive the Spirit of Jesus and of the Father, to receive strength and light to build the “Kindom”.

Father Moreau, the founder of the Holy Cross family, had a great devotion to the Virgin Mary; he wanted the sisters to be consecrated to Mary and more specifically to the ***pierced*** heart of Mary. We have kept this devotion to Mary, Mother of Sorrows and today we refer to her as Mother of Compassion.

In the beginnings of the feminine branch of Holy Cross, the accent was placed on compassion toward Mary who had greatly suffered, but this was transformed over the years. Now, we try to develop a compassionate stance toward our suffering sisters and brothers, in union with the Virgin of the sorrowful mysteries. (p. 183, Like a Mighty Tree)

Today is a bittersweet feast day for the Sisters of Holy Cross. We remember Mary, the woman of Sorrows and the many burdens she carried.

Today is also our congregational Feast day, and this year, we are underlining in a special way, the foundation of the feminine branch of Holy Cross in 1841 in Le Mans, France.

At our foundation, we were called the Sisters of Our Lady of Seven Dolors. This name eventually became the Marianites of Holy Cross (Marianites because of the devotion to Mary); Holy Cross (because the property where Father Moreau housed his religious was in the township ofHoly Cross). From this mother branch, there were two offshoots: in 1869 the Marianites in South Bend Indiana, separated from France and became the Sisters of the Holy Cross and in 1883 the Canadian branch became autonomous under the name of the Sisters of Holy Cross and the Seven Dolors.

You may have heard this story: in the days when the sisters wore habits and travelled by train, one of our sisters was headed to western Canada. A gentleman on the train asked her what was the name of her congregation. English was not her first language, and so she went to her companion and asked, “How do we say “douleur” in English?” Her companion responded Pain, and so sister told the man we were called the Sisters of Holy Cross and Seven ***Pains.***

In 1982, the part of the Seven Dolors was dropped from our name and now we are known as Sisters of Holy Cross. (Soeurs de Sainte-Croix)

Father Moreau wanted to instill in the first sisters that “their name was in keeping with the plan of God for them”; the name was the vocation. The sister could not forget that she was called to follow in the footsteps of Mary as everyday she wore a silver heart bearing the effigy of the Mother of Sorrows

Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors, the first Sister of the feminine branch of Holy Cross, as well as the first General Superior, followed in the same vein as Father Moreau, by encouraging the sisters to have the same heart as Mary’s:

strong and generous,

fervent and energetic,

courageous.

Sister Joyce Rupp, wrote a book on the Seven Sorrows of Mary entitled, “Your Sorrow is my Sorrow”. Even today, we can almost hear Mary say, “Your sorrow is my sorrow” Mary lived a whole life on earth, a real life, like women of her time and in similar situations as people of today: She who had experienced with Joseph, and the Baby the flight into Egypt, do you not think she can tell them, “I know what it’s like…your sorrow is my sorrow.”

How can she not be with families, women with children fleeing countries at war, or countries which can no longer provide the food her children need? She herself has experienced that and knows what it feels like.

We have often seen the scene of Mary at the foot of the cross. How can we imagine the heartbreak lived by this woman during these painful hours? The child she had carried in her womb, this flesh formed in her body…to see it tortured while an angry crowd looked on…

Truly, Mary is always present…Having lived great sorrow, she knows how to be present at the foot of our modern crosses:

* with parents whose children have disappeared, or have committed suicide,
* with parents who have seen their sons and daughters become radicalized,
* with those who are violated and imprisoned because they dare say the truth and to denounce unjust practices,
* with all who suffer emotionally in their aging and sick bodies.

In her life, Mary carried events in her heart in order to understand, not intellectually, but spiritually their meaning, and to refer to Lady Wisdom to see beyond…

Like her, the sisters are called to stand in their lives and in their service.

By living her life with awareness and meditating in her heart, Mary was able to carry deeply, with her son, the suffering of the world, and she continues to do so today. This is the ideal proposed to the Sister of Holy Cross and to all of us as Christians: and I quote from our Constitutions # 39:

“*Compassion in the face of suffering humanity awakens and sustains the apostolic zeal of the Sister of Holy Cross…As Mary did, she carries the weight of evil with love and forgiveness and transforms it into a way of salvation.”*

In closing, let us pray for the three feminine branches of Holy Cross who as their forerunners over the last 175 years, continue their ministry of compassion in Africa, in Asia, in the Caribbean, in Europe and in North and South America.

Mary, standing at the foot of all our modern crosses, **pray for us!**

Mary, woman of compassion, **teach us your ways!**

Mary, our model and patroness, **pray for us!**

Mary who journeyed faithfully with us during the last 175 years, **stay with us!**

**AMEN**

Reference :

Graziella Lalande, c.s.c., Like a Mighty Tree, Fides, 1989, pp. 181-211