

Just Be There Twenty-third Week in Ordinary Time **Our Lady of Sorrows**
Friday, September 15, 2017 7:30 PM Heb 5:7-9; **Jn 19:25-27** (Healing Mass)
(Our being with the suffering is the assurance very often that God really desires, because God usually works through people.)

“Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.”

Today we celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. It may sound like a downer: perhaps somebody didn’t hear about the good news and we are going to focus on sorrow. But the truth is there’s a great deal of sorrow in life. And the reason there’s so much sorrow in life is fundamentally because of sin. Now there may be other forms of sorrow which are light and may be very personal, but **the real sorrow in the world is because of sin. Those who are victimized by sin and those who perpetuate sin carry a heavy burden.**

Now today’s feast emphasizes the fact that our Blessed Mother stood by the cross while Jesus died. What was she doing there? She was being there. **Being with people who are suffering, being with people who are dying, is a powerful witness to love.** It’s easy to celebrate victories. It’s easy to celebrate triumphs. It’s easy to be with winners. When your team pulls it off, that’s an easy celebration. But to be with people who are dying and people who are grieving the death of their beloved, that is a great act of love. **Mary, who was a disciple of Jesus, was also very active in the ministry of compassion.**

Recently I read a book called *Tattoos on the Heart*. It was about a priest in Los Angeles who works in the public housing developments, which we would call probably slums. This is gang infested territory. He has made a great deal of progress in setting up industries for gang members, getting them away from gangs. It’s wonderful work, and he is rightly praised and esteemed for his work. But **his real ministry is to be with people in their worst moments, mothers in particular when their children are killed** gratuitously on the street because they’re from a different gang, and that’s what gangs do. Gangs kill. Gangs destroy. There’s no real reason; it’s just what they do.

Now this is of course sin in a very blatant way. It’s utterly irrational behavior and it’s destructive and ruinous, and it has a lot of innocent victims: the mothers and the fathers of these young people who are killed, sometimes just by a stray bullet because, well, the bullets are there and so are the people, so these people die, hundreds of them every year. I actually didn’t count how many people he actually talked about whom he buried. But burying them is not the real ministry. **The real ministry is being with the family, and it is extremely difficult.**

But that’s what Mary did. Mary stayed with Jesus. And of course Mary herself had her heart broken, just as every mother has her heart broken when her child is taken from her through violence—so Mary’s role as the dolorous one. **Mary’s role is a very important one for us to actually imitate, because the world has many forms of suffering, and there isn’t a lot we can do about it.** We cannot stop people from sinning. We can suggest alternate plans. We can encourage virtue. We can practice virtue ourselves and hope that people might see some good in us that they might want to emulate, but **we cannot stop people from being bad.** We cannot stop

people from being evil **and doing evil things**. And I might add that **because people do evil things doesn't actually make them evil. They may or may not be**—they may or may not be. A lot of people get caught up, for example, in a gang or in some other scheme or situation whereby they really feel that they have to, in order to protect ourselves, do something really bad, but they may actually hate themselves for doing it. On the other hand, others may completely will it; they may really desire what they know is really destructive and wrong for some personal gain of some kind.

But being with people who suffer, whether it's actually violence or whether it's something else, sickness, is important. We cannot actually lay hands on people and heal them miraculously every time. There are times when people are healed miraculously, yes there are, but not every day. And yet **every day we can be with those who suffer. We can accompany them on their very painful journey. We can assure them that God is with them. And our being with them is the assurance very often that God really desires, because God usually works through people.**

And God worked through Mary accompanying Jesus on his cross, accompanying Jesus, indeed, in all of his ups and downs in life. I think there were seven so-called dolors, seven moments of sadness for her; but the real one was the cross, the apex. Now in a sense **Mary really didn't do anything except to be there, and there are many times when that's all God really wants you to do. He just wants you to be somewhere, be with someone.** He doesn't want you necessarily to regale them with stories or teach them something from Scripture; he just wants you to be there. And this is a very holy and sacred ministry. We should not be ignorant of it.