

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As Mary stood at the Cross upon which hung the beaten, bloodied, tortured body of her Son, making him barely recognizable, even to her, she like any parent, like all parents, like you parents, had to be asking, “Why? Why God? Why this pain? Why this sorrow? Why is this happening?” And Mary cried.

We’ve all seen pictures of, if not the magnificent statue itself, of Michelangelo’s “Pieta”, his depiction of Mary tenderly holding the dead body of her precious son, her only child. How deep was her sorrow? How terrible her grief? How inconsolable her heart?

Her sorrow is your sorrow. Her grief is your grief. Her broken heart is your broken heart. It is because she experienced all your pain and suffered all that you have suffered and are suffering, we turn to her and ask her intercession as Our Lady of Consolation.

As many of you know now, it is only those who have walked your walk, cried your same tears, searched for the answer to the same questions that plague you who can actually console you in your terrible loss.

When Jesus looked down from the Cross on Calvary and said to his mother, “Woman, behold your son,” and to John, “Behold, your Mother,” in that moment He gave her to all of us, but especially to those of you who have suffered the death of your child, as Our Lady of Consolation. He knew that those who followed him, who believed in him, would need someone to turn to in time of sorrow and distress to comfort us. Only wrapped in the warm mantle of the one who taught Him to love, Jesus believed we would find the strength, the desire, and the hope to go on in the face of our own terrible loss.

Except for a brief mention of her in the Acts of the Apostles that she was present with the disciples in the Upper Room in Jerusalem after Jesus’ Ascension, this is the last we hear of Mary in the Scriptures. As I’ve pondered her life after Jesus’ suffering, dying, rising, and ascending to the Father, I’ve pictured her not as the beautiful, young woman of statues and icons and paintings. Rather, I’ve envisioned her as a widowed, senior citizen. Though John tells us that “from that hour the disciple took her into his home,” as he continued his preaching, teaching, and ministry in faraway places such as Greece, Mary was left very much alone.

I imagine Mary living, quietly alone for many years, visited from time to time by John and James, Peter and Andrew, and the rest of them. Always, when they came, they would ask about Him. What was He like as a child? She talked about his birth in Bethlehem, the flight into Egypt to save Him, losing him on the way home from Jerusalem, and she and Joseph racing back to Jerusalem to find him. Oh, how Mary loved telling the stories and the disciples loved hearing them and some wrote them down. Then, they would leave and

she would be all alone again—with her memories, with her sadness, with her pain. And she waited.

The years passed quickly it seemed. She never thought that she would live all those years so terribly alone. But she kept on mothering—the disciples, the infant Church. She knew that was what he wanted her to do. The memories never left her; not the sadness; not the pain. And she waited.

The years brought their own hardships. Arthritis had set in. She could no longer straighten her gnarled fingers and her back bent from years of hauling all those buckets of water from the well. She was a little wobbly on her feet now, nowhere near as strong as when she and Joseph fled into Egypt with the infant or ran a full-day's journey back to Jerusalem in search of their son. And she waited.

Though the pain and the sadness and the loneliness never really left her, as the years passed the memories became sweeter. Still, she delighted in telling the stories of what He had done and said, but her focus had changed. She told the stories now, not just to delight others, but to encourage them to believe in Him, to trust in Him, to proclaim Him to others.

Tonight, my dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, I invite you to wrap yourselves in the warm mantle of the one who taught Jesus to love, allow her to wipe the tears from your eyes, to soothe your pain, and comfort your sorrow. Hold on to the sweet memories of your beloved child and share them generously with others, not just to delight them, but to encourage them to believe in her Son, to trust in Him, and to proclaim Him to others. By doing so, I believe with all my heart, it will be Our Lady of Consolation who will take you to your child and together they will lead you to God, the most high, when the time comes for you to go home.

I now ask you to entrust the care of your child to Mary by picking up the rose you've been given, and as you present it before her image, please announce your child's name, that we may all pray with you for him or her.