

ROSARY OF OUR LADY OF SORROWS

With Historical Introduction

FRIARS SERVANTS OF MARY
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LETTER OF THE PRIOR GENERAL

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AVE MARIA

Prot. 930/85

To the brothers and sisters of the Order:

Among the many initiatives for the seventh centenary of the death of St. Philip Benizi (22 August 1285), we can now include the publication of the *Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows* in the series *Mariale Servorum*.

St. Philip's response to the two Dominican friars who asked to what Order he belonged and the vision of Our Lady to St. Peter Martyr described by the author of the *Legenda de origine Ordinis*, both describe the Servite habit in terms of the mystery of suffering in the life of Mary: St. Philip calls it the "habit of the widowhood" of Mary¹ and the author of the *Legenda* describes it as "an unmistakable symbol of the pain she suffered in the most bitter passion of her Son."²

These documents come from the first half of the fourteenth century and are of great interest to the historian of the Order. In them we can see the beginning of the loving devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows that will be developed in later centuries and become one of the characteristics of the Order's spirituality.

Beginning with the seventeenth century, this devotion was expressed in the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows which quickly became one of the principal expressions of attachment to the *Mater dolorosa* on the part of the friars and all those who participated in their spirituality.

Continuing its efforts to revise the popular Marian devotion of the Order, the International Liturgical Commission (CLIOS) has carefully considered the history of the devotion and modern concerns and has prepared two forms of recitation: I. *Tradition* and II. *Alternative*.

The General Council examined this text on 12 September 1984. Finding it consonant with the spirituality of the Order and the values of our tradition, the Council unanimously approved the two forms of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows.

Having considered the approval of the General Council, with this letter I direct that these two forms of recitation of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows be included in the *Mariale Servorum*, the series of publications which presents the most typical Servite expressions of Marian devotion.

I am confident that this revised Servite Rosary will merit the esteem of all Servants of Mary and become a means for the frequent expression of their devotion to Mary as they record the words of Sirach that recurred so often in the traditional prayer books of the Order: "Forget not your mother's pain" (*Sir* 7: 27).

From our Priory of San Marcello, Rome, 27 December 1985, feast of St. John, Apostle and Evangelist.

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Prior General

Fr. Gabriele M. GRAVINA, O.S.M.
Secretary of the Order

¹ "The Life of St. Philip Benizi", no. 8, in *Origins and Early Saints of the Order of Servants of Mary* (Friar Servants of Mary, Chicago 1984) p. 72.

² "Legenda de Origine: A Narrative of the Foundation of the Order of Servants of Mary", no. 52, in *Origins and Early Saints ...*, p. 57.

INTRODUCTION

1. During the Church's history various rosaries have developed as expressions of devotion to the Blessed Virgin. The most widely known is the Dominican Rosary; but also popular is the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows or the Servite Rosary.³
2. The Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows can be considered a popular devotion proper to the Servite Order because of the very real contribution the Friar Servants of Mary made to its development and also because of their commitment to promoting it among the faithful.

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3. The origins of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows are not well known. They would seem to coincide with the development of devotion to the Sorrowful Mother at the beginning of the seventeenth century.⁴

Rudimentary forms

Seven Our Fathers and seven Hail Marys

4. A rudimentary form of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows can be seen in a popular devotion indulgenced by Paul V (d. 1621) with the brief *Cum certas unicuique* of 14 February 1607. The document granted a number of indulgences to popular devotions of the Confraternity of St. Mary⁵

³ Documents of the seventeenth century make explicit reference to the "seven sorrows" of Our Lady when they refer to the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In popular speech, however, it has become common to refer to the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows. This latter name refers to the total mystery of sorrow in the life of Mary and is to be preferred to the other with its reference to a specific number of sorrowful events. Similarly, the Roman Calendar, approved by Paul VI in the letter *Mysterii Paschalis* of 14 February 1969, changed the title of the memorial of 15 September from "The Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary" to "Our Lady of Sorrows" and omitted reference to the number of sorrows.

⁴ See A. M. ROSSI, *Manuale di Storia dell'Ordine dei Servi di Maria* (Convento di San Marcello, Roma 1956) p. 446. In legislative texts and manuals of devotion of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, friars and tertiaries were obliged or urged to recite certain "crowns" (Crown of the 6. Five Psalms, Crown of the Sixty-three Hail Marys) but these were certainly not the Crown or Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows; see G. M. BESUTTI, *Pietà e dottrina mariana nell'Ordine dei Servi di Maria nei Secoli XV e XVI* (Edizioni Marianum, Roma 1984) pp. 73-76.

⁵ In two briefs sent to the Order in 1607 by Paul V, *Cum certas unicuique sis* of 14 February and *Cum nos super* of 28 July, two names are given to the lay groups canonically erected in Servite churches: *Confraternitas s. Mariae* and *Confraternitas b. Mariae Servorum* (see *Annales OSM*, vol. 2, pp. 359 and 360). Among the Servants of Mary, however, these confraternities were both commonly known as the "Society of the Habit of the Blessed Virgin Mary." Following the development of devotion to the Sorrowful Mother, Innocent X (d. 1655) granted a request of the Order and changed the name *Confraternitas Habitus* to *Confraternitas Septem Dolorum B. Mariae Virginis* with the brief *Cum sicut dilectus* of 2 August 1645: "...supplicantibus illius nomine [of Procurator General Angelo M. Panvino] Nobis super hoc humiliter porrectis inclinati, titulum et denominationem Confraternitatum Habitus praedicti hactenus erectarum, et de caetero... erigendarum... in ecclesiis dicti Ordinis in titulum, et denominationem Septem Dolorum ejusdem Beatissimae Virginis... apostolica auctoritate commutamus" (*Annales OSM*, vol. 3 p. 83). See P. M. BRANCHESI, "Terziari e Gruppi laici dei Servi dalla fine del sec. XVI al 1645," *Studi Storici OSM* 28 (1978) pp. 304-305 and 340.

established in various Servite churches. Among others, the pope granted sixty days indulgence for the recitation on Saturday of seven Our Fathers and seven Hail Marys “in honor of the seven de sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary”:

Quoties vero praedicti Confratres, et Consorores... eodem die rhy [sabbati] septies orationem Dominicam, et toties salutationem Angelicam *in honorem septem dolorum ejusdem B. M.* dixerint... toties sexaginta dies de iniunctis eis, seu alias quomodolibet debitis paenitentijs in forma Ecclesiae consueta relaxamus.⁶

5. This is not yet the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows, but some of its elements are already present:

- the seven Our Fathers;
- the explicit reference to the seven sorrows of the Blessed Virgin;
- seven as the number characteristic of the devotion.

Clearly, though, the seven Hail Marys of this popular devotion indulged by Paul V are not yet the “seven septets” that form the essential element of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows and give it its characteristic litany-like rhythm.

The sorrowful mysteries of the Rosary

6. A second rudimentary form of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows can be seen in an adaptation of the Dominican Rosary proposed by Fra Arcangelo Ballottini of Bologna (d. 1622), one of the friars primarily responsible for the emphasis on the devotion to the Sorrowful Mother in the Order’s spirituality. In his book, *Fonte salutifera di Giesù ornata di considerazioni, meditazioni e soliloqui divoti e affettuosi*,⁷ published at Venice in 1608, he urged tertiaries to recite the sorrowful mysteries of the Rosary every day and suggested that they give particular attention to the sufferings of Mary during the passion of her Son.

After the recitation of this “sorrowful Rosary,” Ballottini adds that “one can affectionately meditate on the Blessed Mother at the foot of the cross with her dead Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, in her arms.”⁸

To facilitate this reflection, Ballottini himself composed “meditations on the sacred mysteries of the passion of Jesus Christ and the compassion of his most sorrowful Mother divided into seven points, for the seven days of the week, so that varying the meditation each day the soul will experience greater devotion and the body greater consolation.”⁹

7. What Ballottini suggested for this devotion was both simple and bold:

- simple, because to an already established practice — the Dominican Rosary¹⁰ — he added a new Servite element: explicit meditation on the sufferings of Mary during the passion of Christ;
- bold, because he distanced himself from the Rosary tradition and proposed the daily recitation of the sorrowful mysteries and thus emphasized the contemplation of the passion of Christ at the expense of the joyful and glorious mysteries.

⁶ *Annales OSM*, vol. 2, pp. 359-360.

⁷ See P. M. BRANCHESI, *Bibliografia dell’Ordine dei Servi*, vol. 3, Edizioni del secolo XVII (Bologna: Centro Studi OSM, 1973) p. 37. (Cited here as *Bibliografia OSM*).

⁸ Cited by BRANCHESI, “Terziari e Gruppi laici,” p. 320, no. 63.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ The Dominican Rosary had already received approval from Sixtus IV (d. 1484) in the bull *Ea quae ex fidelium* of 9 May 1479 (*Sec Magnum Bullarium Romanum*, vol. 1, Lyons 1655, p. 432). Further approval was given by Pius V (d. 1572) in the bull *Consueverunt Romani Pontifices* of 17 September 1569 (see *Magnum Bullarium Romanum*, vol. 2, Lyons 1655, p. 284). In the seventeenth century, then, the Friar Servants of Mary found an authoritative point of reference in the Rosary because of its formal approval, its well defined structure and its popularity among the laity.

Two elements of Ballottini's proposal certainly influenced the structure of the eventual Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows: the daily meditation on the sorrowful mysteries (it did become a daily practice for Servite tertiaries) and the *rosary-like structure* of the devotion, though the "decade" of Hail Marys would become a "septet."

Origin of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows

8. The possibility that future research might identify other "rudimentary forms" of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows cannot be excluded. Such discoveries would indicate even more forcefully that the times were ripe for the creation of this devotion. It can be presumed that the devotion resulted from applying the structure of the Dominican Rosary to the custom of daily meditation on the seven sorrows of the Blessed Virgin. The present state of studies, however, does not permit a precise determination as to who was responsible or when and where this new devotion received the classic structure that has come down to us.¹¹

9. In 1617, Fra Arcangelo Ballottini published at Bologna a work entitled *Pratica di recitare la corona della beata Vergine Maria*; unfortunately, no copy has up to now been found.¹² Two years later the same author published *Discorso sopra la corona dei sette dolori che sostenne la beata Vergine Maria nella passione e morte del suo diletteissimo figliuolo e salvator nostro Giesù Christo*.¹³ A year earlier, in 1618, Fra Gregorio Alasia of Sommariva del Bosco (d. 1626) had published at Rome the *Corona septem dolorum beatae Mariae Virginis figurata*; this work, too, has been lost.¹⁴

Carlo Vincenzo Maria Pedini, in his *Istoria del convento di Bologna*, documented the early development and success of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows in the famous Bolognese church of Santa Maria dei Servi:

In the year 1640, by order of the Most Reverend Father General Angelo M. Berardi of Perugia, on Passion Sunday, the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows was publicly recited in church by all of the people before the holy image of Our Sorrowful Mother. This devotion continued every Sunday and feast day after Vespers led by an assigned religious. This devotion and directions for reciting it were published the same year at Bologna when Father Master Paolo Antonio Zani of Bologna was prior. From here this devotion spread to many churches of our province and Order.¹⁵

In 1645, another book was published at Todi: *Tesoro delle grandezze spirituali della santissima Compagnia dell'habito dei Servi di Maria Vergine in memoria dei sette dolori patiti da lei... con un breve modo di recitarli* by Fra Filippo Dragoni of Lucignano di Val di Chicana.¹⁶

10. This listing of sources is not meant to be exhaustive; its purpose is simply to indicate the earliest evidence for the existence of this Rosary. The documents seem to indicate 1617 as the approximate date for the origin of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows and they offer evidence of its rapid diffusion within the Order.

¹¹ The origin of this popular devotion must fall between 1607 and 1617. In 1607, the "Rosary of the Seven Sorrows" is not mentioned in the itemized list of devotions practiced by the laity in Servite churches and indulgenced by Paul V on 14 February 1607; in Arcangelo Ballottini's 1608 book (*Fonte salutifera di Giesù*), this ardent promoter of devotion to the Sorrowful Mother makes no mention of the "rosary" which would certainly have been noted if it had existed. Beginning in 1617, however, references to this rosary become common (see following paragraph).

¹² See *Bibliografia OSM*, vol. 3, p. 39.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁵ Cited by BRANCHESI, "Terziari e Gruppi laici," p. 340, no. 142.

¹⁶ *Bibliografia OSM*, vol. 3, p. 81.

11. History shows that this Rosary was not foreign to the life of the Order, but that it was a concrete devotional expression of a Marian spirituality of the Friar Servants of Mary at the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth. It was not, however, primarily intended to foster the spiritual life of the friars, but rather as a spiritual exercise meant to nourish devotion among the laity of the Company of the Habit.

General chapter decisions

12. As often happens with pious devotions, the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows was not at first an official devotion of the Order. It was simply a personal proposal of a few friars who were sincerely convinced of the spiritual and apostolic value of devotion to the Sorrowful Mother and of the Order's obligation to propagate that devotion among the laity.

13. During the first half of the seventeenth century, the friars' attitude toward the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows could be described as follows: they considered the devotion to the seven sorrows as a time-honored tradition approved by the Church which the Order could neither ignore nor substantially modify,¹⁷ but at the same time they recognized that the Rosary was a new form for expressing this devotion. They therefore did their best to explain it to the people and provide a definite method for its recitation.

14. It is easy to understand why initially the method for reciting the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows was not the same in all provinces and priories of the Order.

General chapters of 1646 and 1652

15. The pastoral advantage of having a uniform method of recitation throughout the Order was soon recognized. The general chapter of 1646 was celebrated at Rome from 19 to 23 May, and Fra Ippolito Bazzoni of Ferrara was elected prior general on the first day. That same afternoon the chapter took up the question of recitation of the Rosary and named two friars from Milan, Angelo Maria Cornelio and Giuseppe Maria Cignardi, to prepare "an appropriate method, common to the entire Order, for publicly contemplating the sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary."¹⁸ When the decrees of this chapter were later published in printed form reference was made to a precise method of recitation already published at Milan:

In exercitiis spiritualibus recolendi dolores B. M. adhibeatur methodus a Religione praescripta, et Mediolani impresa, ut sit tota Religione ubique conformis.¹⁹

Unfortunately, copies of the book referred to in this decree have not come down to us and we do not know precisely what method was suggested.

16. It may be presumed that the decree of the general chapter of 1646 encountered some difficulties in its implementation since the general chapter of 1652, also celebrated at Rome from 19 to 22 May, confirmed the decree of the previous chapter:

Confirmatum postmodum fuit Decretum Capituli Generalis anno 1646 celebrati quoad modum recitandi Coronam 7 Dolorum Beatissimae Virginis typis impressum Mediolani in singulis Ordinibus nostris Conventibus.²⁰

¹⁷ In the discussions that arose concerning the method of recitation, appeal was often made to the authority of the Church ("ex instituto Ecclesiae"); this was especially true for the order and content of the "seven sorrows."

¹⁸ *Annales OSM*, vol. 3, p. 90.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

17. An elective general chapter should have been celebrated in 1658 but was not. Because of this, Pope Alexander VII (d. 1667) proceeded to name Fra Callisto Puccinelli vicar general (5 December 1658) and then prior general (early 1660).

In place of the elective chapter a general diet was convoked on 8 January 1660 and celebrated at Reggio Emilia on 30 May 1660. This meeting also discussed the method for reciting the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows and issued a somewhat polemical decree:

In exercitiis spirituaibus recolendi Dolores B. V. ubique servetur ritus, et methodus antiqua, considerando et incipiendo Dolores B. V. a Circumcisione D. N. Jesu Christi et ubique rejiciatur et rescindatur quaeque alia methodus, ne ab instituto Ecclesiae recedatur, et ad hoc, ut tota Religio sit conformis.²¹

Probably considering the method proposed by the general chapters of 1646 and 1652 to be new, the diet forcefully advocates the recitation of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows according to the “ancient method” which begins the sorrows with the circumcision of Jesus.

18. In reality, the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows was too recent a development to have had an “ancient method” of recitation. For the same reason, the diet could hardly invoke Church authority and pretend to “reject and annul any other method.” The controversy could have related only to the content of the first sorrow which the diet of 1660 wanted to be the Blessed Virgin’s suffering at the circumcision of Jesus. Historical research does not seem to support the peremptory decree of the diet. From the first half of the fourteenth century when the number of the seven sorrows was already firmly established, there were two ways of beginning the series of sorrows:

- in those devotions in which the seven sorrows of the Blessed Virgin were strictly tied to the events of Christ’s passion, the first sorrow was the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Olives;²²
- in other devotions in which the sorrows of Mary were extended to include episodes of the Lord’s infancy, the first sorrow was the prophecy of Simeon.²³

In any case, a list of seven sorrows beginning with the circumcision of Jesus is very rarely found. Neither has anyone yet been able to produce a pontifical document which prescribes beginning the series of sorrows with that suffered by Mary at the circumcision of her Son.

19. Whatever its immediate effect, the decree of the diet of Reggio Emilia did not have any success in the long run. Just eighteen years later in 1678, Fra Lorenzo Giusti of Florence (d. 1685) published a work entitled *Scuola per imparare a meditare i sette dolori di Maria Vergine*²⁴ which gave detailed instructions for the recitation of the Rosary of the seven sorrows of the Blessed Virgin; the first sorrow was the prophecy of Simeon. Certainly, as years passed the list of sorrows

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

²² In MS 10527 of the Bibl. Nat. of Paris (dated Ca. 1350) there are seven prayers (fol. 53-56) attributed to Innocent IV (d. 1254). They were composed “ad honorem VII cardinalium doloris transverberantium gladiatorum, que virgo benedicta Maria seu eius felix anima passa fuit in captione et passione filii sui die Veneris Sancta.” The first sorrow is described: “...quando videlicet audisti filium tuum dulcissimum Ihesum ab impiis captum, ligatum et ad supplicia diversisque illusionibus et opprobriis traditum.” See A. WILMART, *Auteurs spirituels et textes dévots du Moyen Âge Latin* (Librairie Bloud et Gay, Paris 1932), pp. 522-523.

²³ In the *Speculum humanae salvationis* of 1324, chapter 54 treats of *De septem tristitiis b. V. M.* The first sorrow refers to the prophecy of Simeon: “Primam tristiciam, mater dulcissima, tunc habuisti, quando prophetiam Symeonis in tempio Domini audivisti.” See WILMART, *Auteurs spirituels*, p. 532. The text of *De septem tristitiis b. V. M.* is reproduced in Augustine M. LÉPICIER, *Mater Dolorosa: Notes d’Histoire, de Liturgie et d’Iconographie sur le culte de Notre-Dame des Douleurs* (Éditions Servites, Spa 1948) pp. 207-219, with a French translation by P. M. SOULIER.

²⁴ Tinassi, Rome 1678; see pp. 111-126, in particular p. 112.

proposed since 1612 by Fra Arcangelo Ballottini became standard (and he, too, appealed to the authority of the Church):

... the principal sorrows were seven.

The first, when she presented her Son Jesus in the temple and heard the priest Simeon say to her: this child will be the sword which will pierce your soul.

The second, when she fled into Egypt because of the persecution of Herod.

The third, when she lost her Son during a journey and found him on the third day sitting in the midst of the teachers in Jerusalem.

The fourth, when she saw Jesus carry the cross to Calvary.

The fifth, when she saw him nailed to the cross.

The sixth, when she received him from the cross into her arms. The seventh, when she accompanied him to the tomb.²⁵

The Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows in the Constitutions

20. This Rosary was created by the friars to nurture the devotion of the laity who modelled their lives on the spirituality of the Servants of Mary. As often happens in similar cases, the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows returned to the friars themselves and became a part of their customs and one of the pious devotions recommended by the Constitutions.

Attention will be given here, first of all, to the mention made of the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows in the Constitutions of the Germanic Observance; this was the first reference in a constitutional text of the Order. We will turn then to the Constitutions of the entire Order which treat of the Rosary beginning in 1907.

The Rosary of the Seven Sorrows in the Constitutions of the Germanic Observance

21. The Germanic Observance began with the foundation of a priory at Innsbruck by Anna Catherina Gonzaga (d. 1621), daughter of William, Duke of Mantua, and the second wife of Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria (d. 1595). In 1612, Anna Catherina, by then a widow, received the habit of the Servants of Mary and took the name of Anna Juliana in a monastery of nuns she had founded. She immediately set about the founding of a community of friars and requested the presence of some hermits from Monte Senario.

The spirituality of the friars of the Germanic Observance was characterized by special devotion to the sorrows of the Blessed Virgin. Evidence of this is found in an “absolute affirmation contained in a manual for novices which describes the particular scope of the Order as ‘meditation on the passion of Christ and the sorrows which the Blessed Virgin suffered during the passion of her Son and other events in the life of Christ.’²⁶

Given this spiritual climate it is easy to understand why the Constitutions of the Germanic Observance make explicit reference to pious exercises in honor of Our Lady of Sorrows and, in particular, the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows.

The Rosary of the sorrows is mentioned in two chapters:

²⁵ *Pietosi affetti di compassione sopra li dolori della b. v. Maria* (Bartolomeo Cochi, Bologna 1612) p. 153.

²⁶ V. BENASSI, O.J. DIAS, F.M. FAUSTINI, *I Servi di Maria: Breve storia dell'Ordine* (Le Missioni dei Servi di Maria, Rome 1984) p. 125.

- chapter 1, on Marian reverences, states that the friars must wear the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows on their habit belt as a sign that they belong to a “divine army” under the patronage of the Sorrowful Mother;²⁷
- chapter 3, on suffrages, several times specifies the number of Rosaries of the sorrows the lay brothers are to recite instead of the Office of the Dead.²⁸

*The Rosary of the Seven Sorrows
in the Constitutions of the entire Order*

22. In the Constitutions common to the entire Order, the first mention of the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows is found only in 1907. The text was prepared by the General Chapter of Rome in 1905 and published by Prior General Giuseppe M. Lucchesi on 2 July 1907. The late appearance of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows in the entire Order’s constitutional text is explained by the fact that the texts published between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries (in 1643 and 1766) were essentially revisions of the text of 1580 which obviously did not mention the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows.

*The Rosary of the Seven Sorrows:
a devotion to foster the piety of the friars*

23. In chapter 5, on mental prayer, confession and communion, of the 1907 Constitutions, one finds the following exhortation addressed to the friars:
Ad nutriendum magis spiritum, omnibus commendatur ictio spiritualis. Commendatur etiam recitatio coronae Septem Dolorum Beatae Mariae Virginis.²⁹
In this way, the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows found its way into the Order’s Constitutions as one of the devotions recommended for fostering the life of the spirit.

*The Rosary of the Seven Sorrows:
part of the Servite habit*

24. During his term as prior general, Fra Giovanni Vincenzo Lucchesini (1672-1678) made the wearing of the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows on the habit belt obligatory; it soon became a characteristic element of the Servite habit. In his report to the general chapter of 1678 at the end of his term of office, he informed the capitulars of his decision “that everyone was obliged to wear this Rosary on his belt even when travelling.”³⁰

This practice imposed by Prior General Lucchesini entered the Constitutions in 1907:

Tunica... praecingatur. zona nigra coriacea, cum fibula ossea vel ferrea, absque ornatu, in qua nihil pendeat nisi a dextris corona Septem Dolorum Beatae Mariae Virginis.³¹

²⁷ “In signum autem externum, quod Ordo noster sub Vexillo dolorosae Matris Dei militat, quilibet ad latus dexterum pendente habeat et appensam Cingulo Coronam de septem doloribus eiusdem, cui inserta sint numismata exprimentia ex una parte effigiem Dolorosae Matris, ex altera mysteria dolorosa.” Regula S. Augustini episcopi et Constitutiones Fratrum Servorum beatae Mariae Virginis specialem vivendi modum in Germania profitentium (Mainardi, Rome 1727) art. 16.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, art. 3, 6, 7 and 11.

²⁹ *Regula S. Augustini episcopi et Constitutiones Ordinis Fratrum Servorum beatae Mariae Virginis* (Rome: Typografia Pontificia Instituti Pii IX, d 1907) art. 55.

³⁰ “Notizie date al Capitolo generale del 1678,” General Archives OSM, Rome, *Negotia Relig.* a saec. XVII, vol. 64, fol. 276 r.

³¹ *Constitutiones 1907*, art. 106.

For all the Servants of Mary, priests, brothers, cloistered nuns and sisters of congregations aggregated to the Order, the Rosary hanging from the belt was not only part of the habit, but also a sign of their esteem for this devotion and a means for its daily recitation.

*The Rosary of the Seven Sorrows
replaces the Dominican Rosary*

25. Chapter 2, on liturgical offices, of the Constitutions of 1556 published at Bologna during the generalate of Fra Lorenzo Mazzocchi (1554-1357) required the brothers and any who could not read to recite the Rosary in place of the Divine Office:

Laici vero et nescientes legere quotidie intersint missae et coronam, ut vulgo dicitur, loco omnium horarum dicant, quo negotia domi forisque possint exercere commodius.³²

For the first time, a popular devotion called a “corona” (commonly known as rosary) is found in the Constitutions of the Order; previously, in the *Constitutiones antiquae* and the Constitutions of 1503, 155 Our Fathers replaced the Divine Office.³³

26. The Constitutions of 1556 were not acceptable to many. As soon as Mazzocchi left office the text was revoked³⁴ and on 25 April 1569, St. Pius V (d. 1572) officially declared them no longer binding.³⁵ The proposal to substitute the Rosary for the Divine Office, however, had been wise and on was included in all successive constitutional texts including that of 1940.³⁶

The Constitutions of 1643 adopted a similar criterion for the Office of the Dead that was to be recited when a friar died:

Cum aliquis ex nostro Ordine... ab hac luce migraverit... quilibet ro Sacerdos... tres Missas pro eius anima celebret, Clerici vero Officium Mortuorum, qui vero legere non norunt, duas coronas B. V. dicant.³⁷

27. A question remains as to which “corona” was intended in the Constitutions of 1556. Certainly, it was not that of the “seven sorrows” which did not yet exist. For obvious reasons it could not have been the “Crown of the Five Psalms” or that “of the Most Holy Name of Mary.”³⁸

The period in which this norm was handed down (the second half of the sixteenth century), the popularity of the devotion (“corona ut *vulgo dicitur*”), and the function it was meant to serve (substitution of the Divine Office), all lead one to conclude that the “corona” referred to is the devotion known as the Psalter of the Blessed Virgin Mary (because it substituted the 150 psalms) or

³² *Constitutiones Fratrum Servorum beatae Mariae Bononiae anno 1556 editae*, art. 13, in *Monumenta OSM*, voi. 6, p. 82.

³³ “Layci... debent dicere pro matutino sexaginta Pater noster, pro prima quatordecim, pro tertia XIII, pro sexta XIII, pro nona XIII, pro vespere viginti quinque, pro vigilia Domine nostre septem, pro completorio XIII”. *Constitutiones antiquae*, Cap. II, *De officio ecclesiae*, in *Monumenta OSM*, vol. 1, pp. 30-31. In totalling the number of Our Fathers that had to be said in substitution of the Divine Office, 135, the seven said in place of the *Vigilia Dominae nostrae* are not included.

³⁴ See A. ROSSI, *Manuale di Storia*, p. 88 and no. 133.

³⁵ See the brief *Romanus Pontifex* in *Annales OSM*, vol. 2, pp. 216-217.

³⁶ See *Regula S. Augustini episcopi et Constitutiones Ordinis Fratrum Servorum beatae Mariae Virginis* (Typographia Pont. et Episc. S. Joseph, Vicenza 1940) art. 24.

³⁷ *Regula beati Patris Augustini et Constitutiones Fratrum Servorum* (Typis Io. Baptistae Ferronij, Bologna 1643), Cap. 3, *De mortuorum suffragiis*.

³⁸ It would have been absurd to substitute the recitation of the psalms of the Divine Office with a devotion such as the Crown of the Most Holy Name of Mary which was itself made up of five psalms. It should be noted that the *Constitutiones antiquae* substitute seven Our Fathers for the *Vigilia Dominae nostrae* composed of three psalms (see note 28 above). For the crown of the five psalms, see P. M. GRAFFIUS, *The “Corona Gloriosa Virginis Mariae”* (Edizioni Studi Storici OSM, Rome 1964).

the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary (because the Hail Marys formed a “crown of roses” for the Blessed Virgin) or simply the Rosary.³⁹

28. The increasing esteem for the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows gradually led the friars to read the constitutional articles that mentioned the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary or Rosary as references the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows.⁴⁰ This represents an existential understanding of the texts rather than a historical or juridical interpretation. The lay friars who were primarily concerned resolved any philological doubts with their actions. For them, the articles of the Constitutions referred to the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows which they recited with sincere devotion.

29. The entire Order tended to substitute the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows for the Dominican Rosary. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the increasing esteem for the Dominican Rosary expressed by various popes and its resulting importance threatened, in a sense, the propagation of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows. For this reason, Prior General Pier Francesco M. Testa (1882-1888) in 1885 made a request to Leo XIII (d. 1903):

Most Holy Father,

Prostrate before you, the Prior General of the Servants of Mary 31. humbly asks the favor of substituting in the churches of the Order the recitation of the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows of Mary for that of the [Dominican] Rosary whenever this latter is required in sacred functions, while enjoying all the indulgences granted to the [Dominican] Rosary.

If one considers the zeal with which Leo XIII promoted the Rosary and the equality of the two devotions that is implied in the request (particularly with regard to indulgences), a negative response on the pope’s part would not have been surprising.

The response, however, was positive:

Audience of 12 September 1885

His Holiness Pope Leo XIII, having heard and agreed to what was sought, graciously granted the request of the Order of Servants of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

L.M. Card. Vicar⁴¹

If the pontifical privilege was valid for the laity who came to Servite churches, it was certainly valid, too, for the friars themselves when they sought to follow the prescriptions of the Constitutions.

30. The favor granted by Leo XIII ended the process of interpreting the terms Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Rosary in the Constitutions. Literally they referred to the Dominican Rosary as they had in the second half of the sixteenth century; in practice, the understanding of the terms was changed in favor of the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows.

Granting of indulgences

31. During the seventeenth century, indulgences were valued highly in pastoral practice. Notwithstanding the serious objections of the Protestant reformers, the Council of Trent in the

³⁹ Confirmation of the fact that the reference is to what is now called the Dominican Rosary is found in the Constitutions of the Hermits of Monte Senario: “In quel giorno [17 September, anniversary of the deceased benefactors] i conversi, et altri, che non sanno leggere, [dicano] la Corona della Beata Vergine con il Requiem aeternum ad ogni decina.” *Costituzioni de’ Romiti del Sacro Eremo di Santa Maria de’ Servi di Monte Senario* (Florence: Sermartelli, 1613) art. 46.

⁴⁰ In the Constitutions of 1940, the phrase *corona beatae Mariae Virginis* appears in articles 42, 48, 51 and 53 (Cap. 4, *De mortuorum suffragiis*); the term *corona* in articles 24 (Cap. 2, *De officio ecclesiae*), 43, 47, 50 (Cap. 4, *De mortuorum suffragis*) and 140 (Cap. 13, *De itinerantibus*).

⁴¹ Gen. Arch. OSM, Reg. PP. Gen. Rom., 44, p. 37.

decree *Cum potestas conferendi* of 4 December 1563 had reaffirmed the legitimacy and spiritual value of indulgences.⁴²

During the seventeenth century, the granting of an indulgence to a popular devotion implied approval. If the indulgences were particularly generous the devotion acquired greater importance and people were encouraged to practice it since many were concerned with gaining the greatest number of indulgences possible.

32. In this pastoral context it is easy to understand the Order's efforts to obtain ever increasing indulgences for the new devotion.

In 1675, Fra Ludovico Ganzoni, procurator general of the Order, obtained "the ordinary indulgences" for the recitation of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows from Clement X (d. 1676) during an audience.⁴³

Almost fifty years later, on 26 September 1724, the first papal document was issued: Benedict XIII (d. 1730) granted numerous indulgences for this popular devotion in the brief *Redemptoris nostri*. The brief is especially important because it describes the method of recitation:

Corona... septem praecipuorum dolorum e septem septemnarijs Angelicarum salutationum, septemque Dominicis Orationibus, una cum tribus aliis Ave Maria, in honorem lacrymarum ejusdem Beatae Mariae Virginis composita...⁴⁴

Ten years later, on 9 December 1734, Clement XII (d. 1740) greatly increased the indulgences for reciting the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows with the decree *Unigeniti Filii Dei*.⁴⁵

33. Following Vatican Council II, Paul VI reorganized the entire system of indulgences in the apostolic constitution *Indulgentiarum doctrina* published on 1 January 1967.⁴⁶ The two major reforms were the subdivision of indulgences into only two categories (plenary and partial) and the abolition of all numerical values for partial indulgences (one hundred in days, seven years, etc.).

34. On 6 November 1968, Prior General Joseph M. Loftus (1965-1971) requested Paul VI to determine the indulgences for the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows in light of the new norms.

On 3 December 1968, the Sacred Penitentiary granted the following indulgences:

I. For religious of the First, Second and Third Order Regular and for members of the Third Order Secular:

a) a *plenary indulgence* once each year, if the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary is recited in a church or chapel, in community or with some society or with one's family, provided that one goes to confession, receives Holy Communion and recites an Our Father and Hail Mary, or other prayers, for the intention of the Pope;

b) a *partial indulgence* at other times;

II. For the faithful:

a) a *plenary indulgence*, under the same conditions, if the Rosary is recited in a church or public chapel of Servite friars or sisters;

b) a *partial indulgence* when recited, as above, with a contrite heart.⁴⁷

⁴² See H. DENZINGER - A. SCHOENMETZGER, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* 33rd ed. (Herder, Rome 1965) no. 1835, p. 421. 41

⁴³ See *Annales OSM*, vol. 3, p. 296.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 720-721.

⁴⁵ See *Monumenta OSM*, vol. 20, p. 142.

⁴⁶ See *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59 (1967) pp. 5-24.

⁴⁷ *Acta OSM* 28 (1968) pp. 23-24.

II. NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS

35. The Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows is a popular devotion. As the faithful repeat the Hail Marys they reflect on Mary's pilgrimage of faith⁴⁸ and contemplate her cooperation in the redemptive work of Christ her Son, the "man of sorrows" (*Is* 53: 3), by means of whom God "reconciled everything in his person, both on earth and in the heavens, making peace through the blood of his cross" (*Col* 1: 20).

In God's plan, Mary's cooperation continued throughout all of Christ's life from his humble birth in Bethlehem to his death on Calvary; a death, however, that was conquered by resurrection and a humiliation that became glory in the mystery of the Ascension.

Community prayer

36. As already stated, the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows was modelled on that of the Dominicans. At the time the Servite Rosary developed, the first half of the seventeenth century, the Dominican Rosary was already in use for both private and community prayer. The same was true from the beginning for the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows. The earliest references to this Rosary and the first works describing its recitation seem to favor community recitation.⁴⁹

The same can be said today. The Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows is often recited by an individual as a private devotion. But it is also recited by groups of people gathered in church who distribute among themselves the various responsibilities; in its simplest form, there is a leader and the assembly that responds.

Biblical prayer

37. Just as the Dominican Rosary is a biblical prayer, so, too, is the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows. The events of sorrow and salvation contemplated in it are taken from the Gospels themselves or from the Church's interpretation of a scriptural text. The Our Father and Hail Mary that are essential to the Rosary are both taken from the Gospels.

38. Meditation on these events should not be strictly limited to the Gospel text itself. Each has been foreshadowed in the Hebrew Scriptures and points toward other texts of the Christian Scriptures. Thus, for example, the mystery of "persecution during infancy" recurs frequently in the Bible: in his infancy, Moses, the future legislator and mediator of the Covenant, was persecuted (see *Ex* 1: 18 – 2: 10; *Acts* 7: 17-21); during its infancy, Israel, the "child of God" (*Hos* 11: 1) was persecuted by the pharaohs (*Ex* 14: 5-31); during his infancy, Jesus, Messiah and Savior, was persecuted by Herod (*Mt* 2: 13-18); the Church, too, in its infancy was persecuted as is seen in the detailed accounts of the *Acts of the Apostles* (4: 1-21; 5: 17-33; 6: 8 – 8: 1) and in the symbolic-prophetic *Book of Revelation* (6: 9-11; 12: 1-17).

⁴⁸ Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 58.

⁴⁹ For example, Fra Carlo Vincenzo M. PEDINI in his *Istoria del Convento di Bologna* describes the introduction of the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows in the Servite church at Bologna in 1640: "The Rosary of the Seven Sorrows was publicly recited in church by all the people" (see paragraph 9, above). One of the early printed works was by Fra Lorenzo Giusti of Florence (d. 1685): *Scuola per imparare a meditare i sette dolori di Maria Vergine* (see note 22, above). His testimony is important because it describes a community celebration of the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows which begins: "Dear brothers and sisters, we will now pray our usual devotions, devoutly meditating on the seven sorrows which the Blessed Virgin Mary suffered during the life and death of her dearly beloved Son and our Savior" (p. 112). A rubric later states that "the father corrector will say... the people respond" (p. 118).

It is hoped that while meditating on the sorrows of the Rosary, each individual can come to appreciate the foreshadowings in the Hebrew Scriptures and the existential references to the life of the Church.

39. The events of sorrow in the lives of Christ and Mary are the consummation of the sorrow which has weighed down humanity since the original mysterious “break” between God and humankind (see *Gn* 3: 1-17) expressed in repeated acts of infidelity to the Covenant.

– Christ is the “suffering servant” who bore our infirmities and endured our sufferings (see *Is* 53: 4; *Mt* 8: 17); because of his incarnation and role as head of all humankind, he participates in the suffering of every person, past, present and future.

– Mary is the “woman of sorrow” according to the tradition of the Church; liturgical offices and popular devotions place on her lips the words of the Daughter of Sion: “Come, all you who pass by the way, look and see whether there is any suffering like my suffering” (*Lam* 1: 12).

40. The Church’s tradition has seen in Mary the fulfillment of certain prophetic images announcing a woman’s salvific mission accomplished through suffering and struggle. Mary has been seen as:

– the new Eve who together with Christ, the new man, struggles against the ancient serpent (see *Gn* 3: 15);

– the new Mother Sion who in suffering gives birth to all nations (see *Ps* 87: 4-7) drawn together by the love of Christ raised upon the cross (see *Jn* 12: 32; 11: 52; 19: 25-27);

– the faithful Daughter of Sion and the personification of God’s beloved Israel, so often oppressed, divided, and overcome by fear and anxiety (see *Lam* 1:5) but which places her hope in the Lord.⁵⁰

41. Tradition, especially in the liturgy, looks to the great women of Israel, destined for suffering and grace, as prophetic images of the mother of Jesus:

– Judith, who was saddened because of the slaughter of her kinsmen and the devastation of their inheritance (see *Jdt* 8: 22), trusted in God “the savior of those without hope” (*Jdt* 9: 11) and endangered her life for the salvation of her people (*Jdt* 15: 20);⁵¹

– Esther who was “seized with mortal anguish and had recourse to the Lord” (*Est* C: 12) and was willing to offer her life for the liberation of Israel (see *Est* 4: 11);⁵²

– the mother of the Maccabees who was “most admirable and worthy of everlasting remembrance” (*2 Mc* 7: 20), suffering the cruelest of pains as she watched her seven sons perish in a single day, and yet who bore everything courageously, because of her hope in the Lord (see *2 Mac* 7: 20).⁵³

A Christological, ecclesial and anthropological prayer

42. The Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows has a very evident Christological and ecclesial content which helps to understand the salvific significance of Mary’s sorrow within the context of the mystery of Christ and the Church. Its anthropological content leads one to see the value of the suffering of the Lord’s mother in relationship to the existential reality of humankind with its pain and anxiety, its hopes and its destiny.

⁵⁰ *Lumen gentium*, no. 55.

⁵¹ On the solemnity of Our Lady of Sorrows (15 September) the Proper of the Servants of Mary proposes Judith, the heroine of Bethulia, as a prophetic image of Mary. See *Lectioarium Ordinis Fratrum Servorum beatae Mariae Virginis* (Curia Generalis OSM, Rome 1972) p. 34: Lectio I, *Jdt* 13: 22-25.

⁵² The Servite Proper proposes Queen Esther as a figure of Mary on the memorial of Mary, Mother and Mediatrix of Grace (8 May). See *Lectioarium OSM*, p. 23: Lectio I, *Est* 8: 3-8, 16-17a.

⁵³ The Servite Proper proposes the heroic mother of the Maccabees as a figure of the mother of Jesus on the feast of Mary at the Cross (fifth Friday of Lent) whenever it is celebrated as a solemnity. See *Lectioarium OSM*, p. 54: Lectio I, *2 Mc* 7: 1, 20-29.

43. The Christological content of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows is obvious. Since “in the Virgin Mary everything is relative to Christ and dependent upon him,”⁵⁴ the sorrows, too, all refer to the mystery of the passion of Mary’s Son. The sufferings of Christ define the Marian sorrows and give them their significance and salvific value in the life of the Church and individual Christians.

44. The sufferings of Christ intensified during his life and were directed ultimately toward his death on the cross. “We are going up to Jerusalem now. There the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, who will condemn him to death. They will turn him over to the Gentiles, to be made sport of and flogged and crucified” (*Mt* 20: 18-19).

In the same way, the sorrows of Mary became progressively more intense: from Simeon’s prophecy regarding the fate of her Son, the “sign of contradiction” (*Lk* 2: 34), up to the cross which was the crowning moment of her participation in his salvific passion.

45. The paschal dimension of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows must always be kept in mind during its recitation. The Rosary refers constantly to the passion of Christ seen as an event both bitter and glorious: an experience of death and life, defeat and victory, darkness and light, hatred and love. The passion of Christ is the “hour” of the apparent victory of Christ’s enemies and “the triumph of darkness” (*Lk* 22: 53). But, in reality, the passion is the Hour of Christ (see *Jn* 2: 4; 13: 1; 17: 1) in which he voluntarily “humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross” (*Phil* 2: 8). For Christ, this was the supreme expression of love for his friends (see *Jn* 15: 13; *Heb* 2: 11-12) and filial obedience to the salvific plan of the Father (see *Mt* 26: 39, 42).

46. Connected as they are to each other, the passion and resurrection of Christ constitute the essential nucleus of the Paschal Mystery, a single event in salvation history.

The Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows is directed toward the contemplation of the Paschal Mystery; but because of its unique approach to the event of the Lord’s resurrection, it does not explicitly provide for meditation on this mystery. This meditation is left to other popular devotions.”⁵⁵

47. This can be explained by two facts:

– The age-old phenomenon of “cultic historicizing” tended to distinguish and celebrate separately the various episodes of the single Paschal Mystery while giving detailed attention to every aspect of Christ’s humanity.

– The cultural climate of the era in which the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows developed was dominated by devotion to the passion of Christ. During the seventeenth century the devotion to the passion of Christ and the sorrows of the Blessed Virgin reached its greatest intensity. In the West, the devotion to the Sorrowful Mother had begun in the twelfth century and found its most prominent supporters in St. Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109), St. Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 113), St. Bonaventure (d. 1274) and Jacopone da Todi (d. 1306); the devotion also inspired numerous *Planctus Virginis*.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Mariialis cultus*, no. 25.

⁵⁵ For example, the devotion of the “Seven Joys”; D. M. Montagna calls this devotion “one of the oldest of the Order of Servants.” See. “I Sette gaudi di Maria secondo fra Ambrogio Spiera,” in *Fonti per la Storia della pietà mariana in Italia*, vol. 1, *Episodi e testi dei secoli XIV-XVI* (Convento dei Servi di Monte Berico, Vicenza 1979) p. 30. The resurrection of Christ is obviously one of the “joys” of the Blessed Virgin. Fra Paolo of Faenza in *De ratione absolutissimae confessionis* (Bologna, 1500), announces this joy: “Gaude, quia tui nati / quem doiebas mortem pati / fulget resurrectio.” (*Bibliografia OSM*, vol. 1, p. 165).

⁵⁶ The *planctus Mariae* was a very popular literary form from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, first in Latin and

48. The Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows does not, however, ignore the resurrection event; it discreetly, but clearly, refers to it:

– The title of the traditional seventh sorrow, “Mary places the body of Jesus in the tomb, awaiting the resurrection,” presents the Blessed Virgin (in accord with solid tradition) as the faithful disciple and mother who believed in the words of her Son Jesus: “The Son of Man must first endure many sufferings, be rejected by the elders, the high priests and the scribes, and be put to death, and then be raised up on the third day” (*Lk* 9: 22; see 11: 27-28).

– The concluding prayer of this Rosary is directed toward the resurrection:

O God,
when your Son was raised on the cross
you willed that his sorrowing Mother be near him.
Like her, may we be united to the passion of Christ
and share in the glory of his resurrection.

– The Litany of Our Lady of Sorrows, offered as an optional conclusion to the Rosary, ends with the invocation of Our Lady under the title, “Virgin of Easter.”

Ecclesial content

49. The sorrows of Mary, as they are described in the Gospels, are not private experiences; they are part of the history of salvation. What the 1983 General Chapter of the Friar Servants of Mary said in its document on promoting Marian devotion is true, also of the sorrows: “There is no episode relating to Mary in the Gospels which cannot be read in terms of the mystery of Christ and of the Church.”⁵⁷

50. From very early times, theological reflection has pointed out the relationship between Mary of Nazareth and the Church. Councils and popes have repeated this doctrine using a number of terms: Mary is called the type, image, figure or exemplar of the Church. She is the Church’s model in her response of faith, her fertile virginity, her worship, her apostolic commitment and her entrance into glory. She is model, too, in the difficulties and sorrows that must be borne during this earthly pilgrimage.⁵⁸

51. In devout recitation of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows, one easily notes the ecclesial significance of the Blessed Virgin’s sufferings and sees their continuation in the life of the Church. Mary is the exiled mother of a persecuted infant and the intrepid mother of a Son misunderstood by his relatives, rejected by his neighbors, opposed by his religious leaders and finally crucified between two criminals. Because of this, she has become the strong and faithful woman from whom the Church must constantly draw inspiration in its hour of trial: whenever it sees the person and word of its Lord reviled, its children persecuted, its mission impeded.

then in the vernacular. E. De Martino attributes the medieval *planctus Mariae* to the survival of ancient funeral laments that were purified and almost transfigured by the Christian understanding of death. See *Morte e pianto rituale: Dal lamento funebre antico al pianto di Maria* (Boringhieri Editore, Turin 1975) pp. 334-344. Though they differ among themselves, the various *planctus* present the Sorrowful Mother as the “highest model of Christian suffering” (*ibid.*, p. 337) and the “model of the new Christian ethos regarding death” (*ibid.*, p. 341). For an interpretation and catalogue of the *planctus*, see S. STICCA, *Il Planctus Mariae nella tradizione drammatica del Medioevo* (Teatro Club, Sulmona 1985).

⁵⁷ *Do Whatever He Tells You: Reflections and Proposals for Promoting Marian Devotion* (General Curia OSM, Rome 1983) no. 36.

⁵⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 25.

The Blessed Virgin at the cross, the mother who received the dead body of her Son into her arms, has become the symbol of the compassion of the Church called by God to stand with those who suffer and to embrace the pain and affliction of all humankind.

Anthropological content

52. The Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows centers on loving contemplation of the sufferings of Christ and his Blessed Mother.

The Lord Jesus, the new and perfect Man, became like his brothers and sisters in every way (see *Heb 2: 17*) and “was tempted in every way that we are, yet never sinned” (*Heb 4: 15*). He experienced fully the mystery of suffering and death. Like him, his mother, the new Woman, was the first-fruits of sinless humanity.

53. The condition of humanity on earth is one of sorrow and pain. Men and women of every age have prayed with the psalmist: “My life is spent with grief and my years with sighing” (*Ps 31: 11*). Sacred Scripture itself is “a great book about suffering.”⁵⁹

We believe, however, that Christ, in accepting the evil of both physical and moral suffering conquered and redeemed it. Pope John Paul II wrote: “With the Passion of Christ all human suffering has found itself in a new situation... In the Cross of Christ not only is the Redemption accomplished through suffering, but also human suffering itself has been redeemed.”⁶⁰

54. By the grace of God who makes all things work together for the good of those who love him (see *Rom 8: 28*), the pain suffering is transformed into a means of salvation. Sure of this knowledge, the Servants of Mary begin the office of the solemnity of Our Lady of Sorrows on 15 September by exclaiming:

O wonderful expression of your love!
Through Jesus
and Mary his mother,
you have made the pain of suffering
a way to salvation.⁶¹

In the light of faith, a Christian discovers that redemptive value can be given to personal suffering by uniting it to the passion of Christ. What was granted to St. Paul is offered to all: “In my own flesh I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, the church” (*Col 1: 24*). The Christian recognizes that participation in the mystery of the cross leads to the glory of the Resurrection (see *Rom 8: 17-18; 1 Pt 4: 13*).

55. Reciting the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows means approaching the mystery of human suffering with the sensitivity of Mary herself. At the same time, contemplation of the sorrows of the Blessed Virgin permits the Servants of Mary who pray the Rosary to personalize the ideal that “in our service, the figure of Mary at the foot of the cross shall be our model,”⁶² as it is stated in the Constitutions of the friars. This contemplation will make Servites more compassionate and able to understand and share human suffering as they stand “at the foot of those countless crosses where the Son of Man is still being crucified in his brothers and sisters in order to bring comfort and redemptive cooperation.”⁶³

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 6.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 19.

⁶¹ *Liturgia Horarum, Proprium Officiorum Ordinis Fratrum Servorum beatæ Mariæ Virginis*, vol. II/2 (Curia generalis OSM, Rome forthcoming), Die 15 septembris, B. Maria Virgo Perdolens, ad I Vesperas, ant. 1.

⁶² *Constitutions, Order of Friar Servants of Mary* (General Curia OSM, Rome 1977) art. 290.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Numerical prayer

56. Like so many similar devotions, the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows has a numerical structure. The recitation and rhythm of the prayers is not left to the individual, but rather they are determined by the very structure of the devotion. This is due to practical necessity (fixing a beginning and an end for the devotion) as well as historical and symbolic reasons.

The number seven characterizes this Rosary: seven sorrows are contemplated and for each, seven Hail Marys are recited.

Historical reasons

57. For the sorrows, it is quite probable that the number seven was determined by the already existing seven joys which the faithful saw in the life of the Blessed Virgin in the thirteenth century.⁶⁴

It would have been perfectly normal, for the sake of a certain balance and parallelism, that the joys and the sorrows develop together. When the joys were fixed at five, so were the sorrows; when the joys became seven, so did the sorrows of the Blessed Virgin.⁶⁵

Symbolic reasons

58. Over and above historical considerations, the choice of the number seven was related to its symbolic value. In the biblical symbolism so widely accepted during the Middle Ages, seven suggested abundance, fullness and completeness. In listing seven sorrows of the Blessed Virgin, medieval authors did not intend to limit the sufferings of the Mother of Christ to seven particular episodes, but rather they wanted to show that she was truly “full of sorrows” as was often written in the devotional literature of the time.

As the symbolic value of the number seven became less obvious, it came to be seen as a limit and authors often had to specify that these were only the “principal sorrows.”⁶⁶

III. FORM AND STRUCTURE

59. The Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows is here presented in two forms. The first presents the traditional list of the sorrows while the second alternative form presents a new list.

⁶⁴ The joys in the life of the Blessed Virgin were originally five in number but quickly increased to seven. See Wilmart, *Auteurs spirituels*, pp. 328-329. One of the oldest references to seven joys is found in the poem “Virgo templum Trinitatis” attributed by Meersseman to Philip de Grève (d. 1236). For the text, see G. G. MEERSSEMAN, *Der Hymnus Akathistos in Abendland* (Universitäts Verlag, Fribourg 1960) vol. 2, pp. 195-199.

⁶⁵ See WILMART, *Auteurs spirituels*, p. 513 and note 3. See also E. BERTAUD, “Douleurs (Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs)” in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, Ascétique et Mystique*, vol. 3 (Beauchesne, Paris 1957) col. 1686-1701, especially col. 1692-1693 for the number of sorrows.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Fra Arcangelo BALLOTINI, *Pietosi affetti di compassione*, (note 23 above) where the author describes the various images of the Blessed Virgin with her heart pierced by seven swords and states that this was because “seven were her principal sorrows” (p. 153).

The traditional form

60. The first form presents the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows in its traditional form. Its content and harmonious structure give it an undeniable value and its historical importance is attested by the generations of laity and Servants of Mary who have devoutly prayed it with such great benefit. The slight changes made in this new edition of the traditional form are mainly linguistic and do not change the substance of the popular devotion.

The phrasing of the sorrows

61. The seven sorrows of the traditional form of this Rosary are the following:

1. Mary accepts in faith the prophecy of Simeon (*Lk 2: 34-35*).
2. Mary flees into Egypt with Jesus and Joseph (*Mt 2: 13-14*).
3. Mary seeks Jesus lost in Jerusalem (*Lk 2: 43-45*).
4. Mary meets Jesus on the way to Calvary (*Lk 23: 26-27*).
5. Mary stands near the cross of her Son (*Jn 19: 23-27*).
6. Mary receives the body of Jesus taken down from the cross (*Mt 27: 57-59*).
7. Mary places the body of Jesus in the tomb, awaiting the there was resurrection (*Jn 19: 40-42*).

62. As is well known, the number, content and order of the sorrows are documented from the end of the fourteenth century.⁶⁷ This list of the sorrows gradually replaced all others in various regions; it inspired any number of artistic creations and became deeply rooted in the piety of the faithful.

63. In this traditional form, the phrasing of each of the sorrows follows the same pattern. Each begins with the same subject (Mary) followed by a verb (accepts, flees, seeks, meets, stands, receives, places). This similarity in phrasing is meant to facilitate memorization.

The alternative form

64. The alternative form is a new composition. It is not meant to compete with the traditional form, but simply offer an alternative possibility. It has been composed in order to celebrate the inexhaustible mystery of Mary's suffering seen from a particular point of view.

65. The guiding theme of this alternative form is the biblical motif of "rejection." It has profound theological importance and is clearly present in the life of Jesus: he is the Word of God become human (see *Jn 1: 1, 14*), the light that "came into the world, but others loved darkness rather than light" (*Jn 3: 19*); he was the Savior who came to his own, "yet his own did not accept him" (*Jn 1: 11*).

The "mystery of rejection," so evident in the life of the Son from his birth in a place reserved for animals "because there was no room for them in the place where travelers lodged" (*Lk 2: 7*) until his death outside of Jerusalem, also marked the life of his Mother. It is this suffering of the Blessed Virgin, intimately related to the rejection experienced by her Son, that we celebrate in this new form.

The rejection of persons continues to be a tragic reality in today's society. It is seen frequently in daily life: the lack of assistance for many pregnant women, the political oppression of the weak, the indifference shown to the poor and handicapped, the violent death of innocent victims, the persecution of religious minorities. The Christian who has witnessed this very real rejection can readily respond to the dominant theme of this new form of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows.

⁶⁷ For a synthesis of the documentation, see Bertaud, "Douleurs," col. there 1692-1693.

66. The events of salvation history contemplated in this alternative form are not limited to the infancy and passion as in the traditional form. Also included are the public ministry (fourth sorrow) and the period following Easter (seventh sorrow).

The phrasing of the sorrows

67. The seven sorrows of the new form of this Rosary are the following:

1. Jesus, the Son of God,
is born in a cave:
there was no room for his Mother
at the inn (*Lk 2: 1-7*)
2. Jesus, Savior of humankind,
is a sign of contradiction (*Lk 2: 22-35*)
3. Jesus, the new-born Messiah,
is persecuted by Herod (*Mt 2: 13-18*)
4. Jesus, brother of all,
is rejected by his neighbors (*Lk 4: 28-29*)
5. Jesus, the Holy One of God,
is arrested by the high priests
and abandoned by his disciples (*Mt 26: 47-56*)
6. Jesus, the Just One,
dies on the cross (*Jn 19: 25-27*)
7. Jesus, Master and Lord,
is persecuted in his disciples.
(*Acts 12: 1-5*).

68. The phrasing of the sorrows in this alternative form follows the same pattern. Each sorrow begins with the name of Jesus. This is followed by a Christological title (Son of God, Savior of humankind, new-born Messiah, brother of all, Holy One of God, Just One, Master and Lord) which contrasts with the particular aspect of the “mystery of rejection” contemplated in the sorrow.

Two methods of recitation

69. The Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows, in both its traditional and new forms, may be recited in different ways according to circumstances and personal situations. It is one thing to recite it individually (in church, in one’s room, during a trip or taking a walk) and another to recite it in common (in a family or parish, in a community of religious). These differences require different methods of recitation.

First method

70. The first method for reciting the Rosary is entitled, “We contemplate the mystery of your sorrow, Holy Mary.” In both the traditional and alternative forms, it presents the usual, brief and simple structure that can foster a period of contemplative reflection.

Second method

71. The second method for reciting the Rosary is entitled, “We meditate on the mystery of your sorrow, Holy Mary.” In both the traditional and alternative forms, it is meant to foster meditation on the individual sorrows and can, if desired, make this devotion a type of celebration.

Structural elements of the Rosary

72. The Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows is made up of three parts: an introduction, the series of sorrows, and a conclusion. Each of these parts contains several elements. For a better understanding of this devotion, a description of each part will be helpful.

Introduction

73. The sign of the cross. As in many liturgical celebrations and popular devotions, the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows begins “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” while each person makes the sign of the cross. The meaning of this act is obvious: those who pray the Rosary form a holy assembly that professes its faith in the one and triune God of Revelation, Father, Son and Spirit, and proclaims the salvific event of redemption through the sign of the cross.

74. Introductory verses.

After the sign of the cross, the introduction continues with two verses and responses:

L. We praise and we bless you, O Lord.
A. Because you willed that the Virgin Mother share in the work of salvation.

L. We contemplate your sorrow, holy Mary.
A. May we follow you in the pilgrimage of faith.

The first verse is an invitation to praise God because of the Blessed Virgin’s participation in the mystery of salvation. The second touches on the prayer itself (“we contemplate your sorrow”) and the commitment that should flow from it (“follow you in the pilgrimage of faith”).

Recalling the sorrows of the Blessed Virgin

75. The central part of the Rosary is the recalling of the Mother’s participation in the suffering of her Son. It consists of the meditative recitation of seven Hail Marys for each sorrow that is proposed as the subject of meditation.

For each of the seven sorrows the recitation follows a single pattern:

- a) announcement of the sorrow
- b) recitation of the Lord’s Prayer
- c) recitation of seven Hail Marys.

76. Announcement of the sorrow.

In the first method of recitation the sorrow is announced with the brief title provided for each; for example, “Mary meets Jesus on the way to Calvary” or “Jesus, the Just One, dies on the cross”.

In the second method, the announcement includes the reading of a biblical text. After the title of the sorrow (which might be omitted) a brief passage of the Scriptures referring to the sorrow is read. Although the text is brief, the announcement of the sorrow should become a true proclamation of the Word, done at the lectern and followed by a period of silence. The text of the Christian Scriptures is preceded by a brief text of the Hebrew Scriptures. This passage is not meant to be proclaimed but is offered for the silent meditation of the persons praying the Rosary. In this way those who are present can appreciate the profound harmony that unites the two groups of Scriptures even as they meditate on the sorrows of the Blessed Virgin. Nothing, however, prohibits the proclamation of both texts if this is desired. In this case, it would be best to have two different readers.

77. The Our Father.

In the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows, the Lord's Prayer precedes the recitation of each group of Hail Marys, as it often does in popular devotions, in particular the Dominican Rosary.

This custom is probably due to the conviction that the Our Father is the fundamental prayer of the Christian and the norm for every other prayer form. Further, in praying the Our Father even the humblest of the faithful can offer praise and supplication in a most sublime way.

78. The Hail Mary.

The seven groups of seven Hail Marys form the essential element of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows. This remembrance of the Incarnation which lies at the very heart of the mystery of Christ and the Blessed Virgin offers a context in which to contemplate the events of suffering and salvation in the life of Jesus which profoundly affected the life of his Mother.

79. In the first method of recitation, the seven Hail Marys said in the traditional way. The leader recites the biblical part of the prayer which is essentially a prayer of praise (the "salutation" of the angel joined to Elizabeth's "blessing"). The assembly responds with the ecclesial part (Holy Mary) which is a prayer of supplication.

80. In the second method of recitation, the manner of reciting the seven Hail Marys has been modified.

The seven-fold repetition of the Hail Mary is limited to the biblical part only. The leader recites the "salutation" of the angel and the assembly responds with the "blessing" of Elizabeth to which is added an additional phrase. This phrase follows the name of Jesus and is meant to rhythmically recall the sorrow being contemplated:

*L. Hail, Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with you.
A. Blessed are you among women
and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus,
intent on doing God's will*

*or
whom you anxiously sought.
(Third sorrow of the traditional form)*

The ecclesial part of the Hail Mary is said only once after each set of seven Hail Marys. Here, too, a phrase has been suggested to relate the sorrow being recalled to our condition as sinners:

*A. Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
unwilling to carry the cross. Amen.*

(Fourth sorrow of the traditional form)

81. After the last group of seven Hail Marys, three more Hail Marys may be added to ask the Lord, through Mary's intercession, for the gifts of reconciliation and peace which flow from the death and resurrection of Christ.

Conclusion

82. The conclusion of the Rosary contains five elements: verse, acclamation, sequence or litany, prayer and dismissal. After the seven groups of seven Hail Marys, the conclusion introduces another emphasis: the joyful hope of Christ's disciples sustained during life's pilgrimage by the intercession of the glorious Virgin Mary.

83. The verse.

The verse serves to link the central part of the Rosary to the conclusion:

L. We praise you, Holy Mary

A. Faithful Mother at the cross of your Son.

This verse praises the Blessed Virgin for her fidelity to the mission she received from God: "The Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross, where she stood (see *Jn* 19: 25), in keeping with the divine plan, enduring with her only begotten Son the intensity of his suffering, associating herself with his sacrifice in her mother's heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this victim which was born of her."⁶⁸

84. The acclamation.

The suffering endured by Mary was ultimately transformed by the joy of her definitive participation in the Easter event at the moment of her Assumption. For herself, her sorrows were the cause of her glory; for us, they are a source of grace, consolation and hope. For this reason, after having contemplated Mary's sorrows, the assembly acclaim:

Blessed are you, Queen of Martyrs:
united to the passion of Christ,
you became our Mother
and a sign of hope in our life.

This acclamation is a "blessing" which the assembly addresses to the Blessed Virgin. Three themes are emphasized: Mary's participation in the passion of Christ, her spiritual maternity, her role as example and comforter for Christians in the difficulties of their earthly pilgrimage.

85. The *Stabat Mater*.

The acclamation is followed by the singing or recitation of the *Stabat Mater*, but it is always optional. This famous planctus or lament has been described as "full of desolation yet balanced by the spiritual severity that is traditional in Christian hymnody."⁶⁹ It is often attributed to Jacopone da Todi (d. 1306) but the proofs are not definitive. It is found in numerous liturgical books from the second half of the fourteenth century.

In 1727, the *Stabat* was introduced into the Roman Missal by Benedict XIII (d. 1730). It is still found in the Roman liturgy as an optional sequence for the memorial of 15 September and for optional use as the hymn for the various hours of the Office of that day.

The *Stabat Mater* has been esteemed, understood and prayed by Christians for centuries. This fact can be explained by the intrinsic merits of the text itself: its literary value, its simple language and

⁶⁸ *Lumen gentium*, no. 58.

⁶⁹ A. MOMIGLIANO, *Storia della letteratura italiana dalle origini ai nostri giorni*, 8th ed. (Principato, Milan 1977) p. 13

structure, its lyricism and religious feeling, its “musical soul,”⁷⁰ its vivid description of the *passio Christi*, its tender contemplation of the *compassio Virginis*, and the poet’s prayerful participation in the mystery of the sufferings of Christ and his Mother.⁷¹ The sequence is noted, too, for its mystic flights, the poet’s fear and trembling before his own fate and his confident recourse to the Blessed Virgin.

The *Stabat Mater* has traditionally been recited with the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows. It is found in the earliest descriptions of the recitation of the Rosary that have come down to us. At first only a part was recited, a third or a seventh, depending on whether the Rosary was part of a triduum or septenary.⁷² Later, the entire text was recited.

Notwithstanding the traditional use of the *Stabat Mater*, the present text includes a rubric that reflects our changed times: “The *Stabat* may be substituted by any hymn with similar content or by the Litany of Our Lady of Sorrows.”

86. The Litany of Our Lady of Sorrows.

After Leo XIII (d. 1903) ordered that the Litany of Loreto be added to the Dominican Rosary when recited in public during October,⁷³ the combination “Rosary-Litany” became customary in popular Christian piety. This devotional usage lies behind the suggestion that a litany follow the recitation of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows. A litany in honor of the Sorrowful Mother is not new in the history of devotion to the sorrows of Mary. At least two forms are frequently encountered in nineteenth century devotional literature.⁷⁴

The form offered in this text is made up of thirty-three Marian invocations divided into “triplets.” The invocations view the mystery of Mary’s sufferings from a number of perspectives: as Mother of Christ (*Mother of the Crucified...*, invocations 1-3) and spiritual mother of all men and women (*Mother of the Redeemed...*, invocations 4-6); as virgin (*Virgin of silence...*, invocations 7-12), woman (*Woman of strength...*, invocations 13-18) and associate of the Savior e (*New Eve...*, invocations 19-21); as merciful intercessor for all her suffering children (*Consolation of the afflicted...*, Invocations 22-30); in her present glorious state which is the result we of her bitter sorrow (*Virgin of Easter...*, invocations 31-33).

87. The prayer.

After the acclamation (or after the *Stabat Mater* or Litany, if one of these is recited), a final prayer is said. Two texts are offered:

- the first is a slightly modified form of the opening prayer of the Mass for 15 September;
- the second is a new text that asks God to grant that we journey with Mary “on the way of faith and unite our sufferings to the passion of Christ.”

⁷⁰ The expression is that of A. Momigliano in his commentary on the *Stabat* in *Antologia della letteratura italiano*, vol. 1, *Dalle origini alla fine del Quattrocento*, 9th ed. (Principato, Milan 1976) p. 15, note 2

⁷¹ The desire of the poet to participate in the passion of Christ (Fac, ut portem Christi mortem, / passionis fac consortium / et plagas recolere; Fac me plagis vulnerari, / fac me cruce inebriari / et cruore Filii) and the sufferings of the Blessed Virgin (... poenas mecum divide... Fac me tecum pie flere... Iuxta crucem tecum stare / et me tibi sociare / in planctu desidero... fac me tecum piangere) is one of the recurring motifs of the *Stabat Mater* expressed with great emotional intensity

⁷² See, for example, the already cited “Modo di recitare la corona da sette dolori della B. Vergine” in GIUSTI, *Scuola per imparare*, pp. 118-126 (note 22 above), where the *Stabat Mater* is divided into three parts for use on three days

⁷³ See Encyclical *Supremi apostolatus officio* in *Acta Leonis XIII Pontificis Maximi*, vol. 3 (Typographia Vaticana, Rome 1884) p. 286.

⁷⁴ The most widely used form in the Order of Servants of Mary was the “Litaniae de Matre dolorosa.” See *Manuale in usum Fratrum Ordinis Servorum B.M.V.* (Innsbruck: Litteris Societatis Marianae, 1888) pp. 256-258. For an evaluation and brief commentary, see L.M. PAZZAGLIA, *La Donna del dolore*, 3rd ed. (LICE-R. Berruti, Turin 1953) pp. 322-328. The Litany of Our Lady of Sorrows was a strictly private devotion since its recitation “in ecclesiis vel oratoriis publicis” was explicitly prohibited. See *Decreta authentica Congregationis Sacrorum Rituum*, vol. 3 (Typographia Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, Rome 1900) decree no. 3820, p. 260.

88. Dismissal.

The formula for the dismissal is simple:

L. May the Virgin Mary protect us
and lead us kindly on life's journey.

A. Amen.

The Rosary concludes, as it began, with reference to the concept of "journey" or "pilgrimage." After having prayed to follow Mary "on the pilgrimage of faith" in the introduction, we now ask her protection and guidance "on life's journey."

IV. PASTORAL VALUE AND USE

89. The Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows is a popular devotion; it does not enter into the category of liturgy. Presuming a prayerful celebration, the spiritual value and pastoral effectiveness of this Rosary depend upon its essential characteristics:

- its potential to lead the faithful to a greater awareness of the importance of the saving passion of Christ in the Paschal Mystery through the contemplation of the "compassion" of Mary;
- the opportunity the Rosary offers to view the mystery of human suffering in light of the example of Mary of Nazareth, woman of faith, and the exceptional way in which she lived through her suffering;
- the fact that the Rosary leads persons to share in the sufferings of others since the celebration of the sorrows of Mary cannot be limited to meditation, thanksgiving and praise but must be expressed in active concern for all who press suffer;
- the Rosary's ability to incite sentiments of compassion, because after the contemplation of the merciful goodness of Christ, nothing moves a person to compassion as much as the loving contemplation of the compassion of the Blessed Virgin: at the foot of the cross, she is "Our Lady of forgiveness."

90. The suggestions that follow are meant only for the public recitation of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows within the Servite Family. Private recitation or recitation in other groups might require other directives that cannot be given here.

The Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows and the Servants of Mary today.

91. The present-day Constitutions of the Order of Friar Servants of Mary and most of the postconciliar constitutional texts of the women's congregations affiliated to the Order do not explicitly mention the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows.

An implicit reference can be seen, however, in one article of the friars' Constitutions which exhorts communities to "express their devotion to Mary by drawing on practices from our living tradition."⁷⁵ The Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows is, in fact, part of the living tradition of the Order.

92. With regard to the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows, the brothers and sisters of the Order should feel serenely free. They might, however, feel drawn to its recitation and ready to encourage it among the faithful for a number of reasons:

⁷⁵ *Constitutions OSM*, art. 7.

- its intrinsic beauty and spiritual value, its close relationship to the revealed Word, its pastoral effectiveness;
- its part in the Marian heritage of the Order which expresses some of the more important values that define the identity of the Servants of Mary.

*A popular devotion
typical of Servite Laity*

93. The history of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows demonstrates that it arose primarily as a way of fostering devotion to the Sorrowful Mother among the laity who in various ways participated in the life and spirituality of the Order (Company of the Habit, Confraternity of the Seven Sorrows, Third Order).

Even today, this devotion is especially esteemed and practiced by Servite laity. The special importance which this Rosary has for members of the Secular Order is confirmed by liturgical texts. In “The Rite of Admission to the Period of Probation in the Secular Order of Servants of Mary” promulgated by Prior General Michel M. Sincerny on 8 September 1983, the candidate receives the Rule and the Rosary:

Brother/Sister, receive this Rule of Life
and the Rosary of the sorrows of the Virgin.
Bear witness to the Gospel of Christ in the world,
and stand, like Mary,
near the crosses of your brothers and sisters.⁷⁶

Liturgical time and the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows

94. The Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows developed during a period (the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries) when liturgical sensitivity was often lacking in many devotional expressions of the Latin Church. This situation affected the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows and led to certain practices which, today, because of our greater awareness of the liturgy, need to be corrected. With regard to the seasons and days appropriate for the recitation of this Rosary, the general norm laid down by the Vatican Council must be followed: popular devotions must be in harmony with the liturgical seasons.⁷⁷

*Sunday and the Rosary
of Our Lady of Sorrows*

95. In times past the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows was recited publicly in Servite churches every day of the week, including Sunday. During the past several decades, Sunday has again come to be considered as “the Lord’s day,” “the original feast day,”⁷⁸ and “the weekly memorial of the resurrection of Christ.” The public recitation of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows no longer seems appropriate on the day which is “the weekly celebration of Easter.”

Two exceptions, however, may be justified:

⁷⁶ *Rites of Admission and Promise in the Secular Order of Servants of Mary* (General Secretariate for the Secular Order and Lay Groups, Rome 1985) p. 19.

⁷⁷ VATICAN COUNCIL II. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 13.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* no. 106.

- when the solemnity of 15 September is transferred to Sunday; on this day, the Eucharistic liturgy itself celebrates not only the death and resurrection of Christ, but also the mystery of the suffering of the Blessed Virgin already transfigured in glory;
- on the third Sunday of the month in those places where the recitation of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows by members of the Secular Order is so established a custom that suppressing or replacing it would only lead to pastoral harm.

*The fifty days of Easter and
the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows*

96. In the same way, the public recitation of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows does not seem appropriate during the Easter Season which is dedicated to the celebration of the great saving mysteries: Resurrection, Ascension and Pentecost. All of these lie beyond the immediate focus of this popular devotion.

Advent and the Christmas Season

97. Because of the mysteries they celebrate, both Advent and the Christmas Season would appear to be inappropriate times for the public recitation of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows which centers primarily on the Lord's passion. It should be noted, however, that the passion of the Lord and the *compassio Virginis* are both present in various events of Christ's infancy: the first, second and third sorrows in both the traditional⁷⁹ and alternative⁸⁰ forms refer to episodes of the Savior's infancy. For this reason, the following principle seems valid: during Advent and the Christmas Season, the recitation of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows is legitimate whenever the Gospel of the day's liturgy narrates an event reflecting the mystery of suffering of Christ and the Blessed Virgin.⁸¹ Because of the close relationship between the events of the incarnation and birth and those of the passion and resurrection, the recitation of the Servite Rosary in these cases will not detract from the liturgical mystery being celebrated, but rather aid and deepen contemplation of the mystery.

Days recommended for recitation

98. By way of suggestion, the following list includes the days which seem most appropriate for the public recitation of ten the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows in the churches and chapels of the Servants of Mary:

- feasts which celebrate an aspect of the mystery of Christ recalled in the Rosary itself (for example, 2 February, the Presentation of the Lord, when the Gospel of the day is the prophecy of Simeon, Luke 2:34-33, which is fundamental for 19 the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows, or 14 September, the Triumph of the Cross);
- feasts which celebrate the sorrows of Mary (Friday of the fifth week of Lent, Mary at the Cross, and 15 September, Our Lady of Sorrows) and other feasts and memorials of Our the Lady when the Gospel of the day narrates an episode of the Blessed Virgin's suffering that is recalled in the Rosary

⁷⁹ In the traditional form, these are: 1. "Mary accepts in faith the prophecy of Simeon" (Lk 2: 34-35); 2. "Mary flees into Egypt with Jesus and Joseph" (Mt 2: 13-14); 3. "Mary seeks Jesus lost in the temple" (Lk 2: 43-45).

⁸⁰ In the alternative form, these are: 1. "Jesus, the Son of God, is born in a cave: there was no room for his Mother at the inn" (Lk 2: 1-7); 2. "Jesus, Savior of humankind, is a sign of contradiction" (Lk 2: 22-35); 3. "Jesus, the new-born Messiah, is persecuted by Herod" (Mt 2: 13-18).

⁸¹ For example, on 29 December (the fifth day of the octave of Christmas), the Eucharistic liturgy proclaims Luke 2: 22-35 which includes the prophecy of Simeon.

(for example, the Saturday after the solemnity of the Sacred Heart, the memorial of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, when the Gospel of the day is that of the loss of Jesus in the temple, Luke 2:41-51);
– the weekdays of Lent, especially Fridays;
– during the month of September, according to the Order's tradition, except on those days when the celebration of the day would suggest another choice (for example, 8 September, the Birth of Mary);
– Fridays of Ordinary Time, unless the feast or memorial of the day suggests another choice;
– weekdays of Ordinary Time.

The Dominican Rosary and the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows

99. It is well known that at a certain time there was some tension felt within the Order with regard to the use of the Dominican Rosary so highly recommended by various popes and the use of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows esteemed as part of the special patrimony of the Order. In a certain sense, the problem was resolved in favor of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows during the pontificate of Leo XIII (d. 1903).⁸²

Today, the Servants of Mary see the two Rosaries as being complementary rather than in opposition to each other. The following norm may be followed: keeping in mind the customs and composition of the group, whenever a Rosary of the Blessed Virgin is to be recited, the one which best corresponds to the liturgical season and the liturgy of the day should be chosen.

100. It should be noted, however, that Leo XIII's concession to the friar and sister Servants of Mary allowing them to substitute the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows for the Dominican Rosary remains valid.

⁸² See above, paragraph 29.