

Holy Wednesday
7 p.m. March 31, 2010

Prelude

Stabat Mater by Giovanni Felice Sances (1600-1679)
Sung by Immanuel Choir member Lauren Alfano

Latin:

English:

Stabat Mater dolorosa
Juxta Crucem lacrimosa,
Dum pendebat Filius.

At the cross her station keeping,
Mary stood in sorrow weeping
When her Son was crucified.

Cujus animam gementem,
Contristatam et dolentem,
Pertransivit gladius.

While she waited in her anguish,
Seeing Christ in torment languish,
Bitter sorrow pierced her heart.

O quam tristis et afflicta
Fuit illa benedicta
Mater Unigeniti!

With what pain and desolation,
With what noble resignation,
Mary watched her dying Son.

Quae maerebat, et dolébat,
Pia Mater, dum vidébat
Nati poenas inclyti.

Ever-patient in her yearning
Though her tear-filled eyes were burning,
Mary gazed upon her Son.

Quis est homo, qui non fleret,
Matrem Christi si vidéret
In tanto supplicio?

Who, that sorrow contemplating,
On that passion meditating,
Would not share the Virgin's grief?

Quis non posset contristári,
Christi Matrem contemplári
Dolentem cum Filio?

Christ she saw, for our salvation,
Scourged with cruel acclamation,
Bruised and beaten by the rod.

Pro peccatis suae gentis
Vidit Jesum in tormentis,
Et flagellis subditum.

Christ she saw with life-blood failing,
All her anguish unavailing,
Saw him breathe his very last.

Vidit suum dulcem natum
Moriendo desolatum,
Dum emisit spiritum.

Mary, fount of love's devotion,
Let me share with true emotion
All the sorrow you endured.

Eja mater, fons amoris,
Me sentire vim doloris
Fac, ut tecum lúgeam.

Virgin, ever interceding,
Hear me in my fervent pleading:
Fire me with your love of Christ.

Fac, ut árdeat cor meum
In amándo Christum Deum,
Ut sibi compláceam.

Mother, may this prayer be granted:
That Christ's love may be implanted
In the depths of my poor soul.

Sancta Mater, istud agas
Crucifixi fige plagas
Cordi meo válide.

At the cross, your sorrow sharing,
All your grief and torment bearing,
Let me stand and mourn with you.

Tui nati vulneráti,
Tam dignáti pro me pati,
Poenas mecum dívide.

Fairest maid of all creation,
Queen of hope and consolation,
Let me feel your grief sublime.

Fac me tecum pie flere,
Crucifixo condolére,
Donec ego víxero.

Virgin, in your love befriend me,
At the Judgment Day defend me.
Help me by your constant prayer.

Juxta Crucem tecum stare,
Et me tibi sociáre
In planctu desídero.

Savior, when my life shall leave me,
Through your mother's prayers receive me
With the fruits of victory.

Virgo vírginum praeclára,
Mihi jam non sis amára:
Fac me tecum plángere.

Virgin of all virgins blest!
Listen to my fond request:
Let me share your grief divine.

Fac, ut portem Christi mortem,
Passiónis fac consórtem,
Et plagas recólere.

Let me, to my latest breath,
In my body bear the death
Of your dying Son divine.

Fac me plagis vulnerári,
Fac me Cruce inebriári,
Et cruó re Fílii.

Wounded with His every wound,
Steep my soul till it has swooned
In His very Blood away.

Flammis ne urar succénsus,
Per te, Virgo, sim defénsus
In die júdicii.

Be to me, O Virgin, nigh,
Lest in flames I burn and die,
In His awe-full judgment day.

Christe, cum sit hinc exíre
Da per Matrem me venire
Ad palmam victóriæ.

In His awe-full judgment day.
Through your mother's prayers receive me
With the fruits of victory.

Quando corpus moriétur,
Fac, ut ánimæ donétur
Paradási glória. Amen.

While my body here decays
May my soul your goodness praise,
Safe in heaven eternally. Amen.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P Almighty God, your Son our Savior suffered at human hands and endured the shame of the cross. Grant that we may walk in the way of his cross and find it the way of life and peace; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

FIRST LESSON Isaiah 50:4-9a RSV

⁴The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary. Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. ⁵The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I turned not backward. ⁶I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting. ⁷For the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been confounded; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; ⁸he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me. ⁹Behold, the Lord GOD helps me; who will declare me guilty?

SECOND LESSON..... John 13:21-32, RSV

²¹When Jesus had thus spoken, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” ²²The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. ²³One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was lying close to the breast of Jesus; ²⁴so Simon Peter beckoned to him and said, “Tell us who it is of whom he speaks.” ²⁵So lying thus, close to the breast of Jesus, he said to him, “Lord, who is it?” ²⁶Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I shall give this morsel when I have dipped it.” So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.” ²⁸Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. ²⁹Some thought that, because Judas had the money box, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the feast”; or, that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰So, after receiving the morsel, he immediately went out; and it was night. ³¹When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; ³²if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.

THE HOLY GOSPEL..... John 19:25-30, KJV

²⁵Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! ²⁷Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. ²⁸After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. ²⁹Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. ³⁰When

Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

HYMN LBW 110

At the Cross, Her Station Keeping

STABAT MATER

SERMON

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

²⁶When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!
²⁷Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. (John 19:26-27, KJV)

Long ago, when Jesus was but a wee baby, old Simeon had taken Jesus in his arms and blessed God that he been permitted to see this Child. (Luke 2:27ff). The old man was ready to depart in peace and to be gathered to his ancestors, for he had seen the Lord's salvation:

³⁰For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, ³¹Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; ³²A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. (Luke 2:30-32, KJV)

Then the old eyes had shifted away from the Christ Child and gazed upon Mary and Joseph. He blessed them too, which, I bet, they were glad for, because all young parents need our blessings. But then old Simeon went ahead to give a prophecy concerning Jesus. Contained within that prophecy, as a kind of parenthesis, were solemn words concerning Mary:

³⁴and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against ³⁵(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed." (Luke 2:34-35, RSV)

In the events of this Holy Week, Mary receives this sword piercing through her soul. As surely as the soldier's spear pierced the side of Jesus, causing blood and water to flow, so a sword of sorrow pierced the soul of Mary, the mother of our Lord as she watched on.

What I want to do in this sermon is to consider one of the scenes at the cross: our Lord's entrusting of Mary and his disciple John to one another. That was quite a thing to do, revealing both our Lord's tenderness and his courage. He fought through his pain, utter exhaustion, and the collapse of his bodily systems, and with his dying breath he did what he could for these two people he loved: he entrusted his mother to his beloved disciple and his disciple to her.

I want to consider this little story twice, first from a simple, human point of view, then from a mystical or symbolic point of view. Let's begin with the plain, human perspective.

So, consider Sister Mary. That's how folks in my childhood church referred to one another, as "Brother and Sister." My mother was "Sister Rachel." The father of my friend Steve was "Brother Sam." I rather like these terms of endearment because they remind us that no one in the Communion of Saints is alien to us, but, rather, are brothers and sisters in the Lord with us. We each bear an equal dignity and an equal hope based on our Saviour Jesus.

So, consider Sister Mary. She is a mother. I know something about that, because I had a mother, and she was a gem, and I have a wife, and she's a gem too.

By tradition, Mary was a young woman when she bore the Christ Child. Let's imagine her to be, say, nineteen years old. Also, by tradition, Jesus was thirty-three years old when he died. That would make Mary fifty-two years old there at the foot of the Cross. Think of a seasoned mother.

We can picture Mary's joy as a young mother. When Jesus is newborn, he looks to her to be the most beautiful baby this world has ever known. Even as she holds him and nurses him, she admires his little hands and fingers and feet. She thinks his eyes are beautiful. She is filled with the godly conviction that many parents have known, that this little one lying there in her arms is a gift from God and the most important thing in her life. The praise of old Simeon, that this Child will be for the "rising and falling of many in Israel" (Luke 2:34), well, that praise can hardly add to the joy she already feels simply to be the mother of this child.

As her child grows, Mary keeps her eye on him. She has her own things to do, naturally, but as best she can, she watches over Jesus as he plays with his little playmates. Who knows? Perhaps Judas was one of those playmates -- Judas, the little boy who grew up to follow, but then to betray Jesus. One way or another, Judas was once a lovely little boy too, and as Jesus grows up, so does Judas. Their path will intersect someday. Mary continues to watch Jesus as he works in his father's carpentry shop. She watches Jesus, ponders him, and in the end becomes his disciple.

Peter had sworn loyalty to Jesus and declared that he would never abandon Jesus. But what are Peter's words compared to mother's love? Peter is not there at the cross. But Mary is.

By now, she is middle-aged. She is a seasoned mother -- one who is filled with sorrow as she watches her son die. Can sorrow be deeper than this: to see such a good and pure son die such a cruel death? Judas and the rest: we are capable of growing up and doing such harm in this world. We are capable of causing such terrible heartbreak.

What can Mary do at the foot of the Cross? What more remains to her? She prays for her Son, I am sure. She calls to him and speaks of her love for him. Beyond such loving things, she can only wait for his end to come. But before his end comes, Jesus does this final, beautiful thing: he entrusts his mother and the one disciple who abides with him to each other. He entrusts Mary to John and John to

Mary.

So, that's the simple human story. Let's consider the story one more time, this time from the mystical point of view.

In the Church's long tradition of reflection on this story, both Mary and John take on symbolic meaning, both deeply connected with our Lord Jesus Christ. In that tradition interpretation, Mary represents the Church and John represents the disciples. John represents the people of the Church. It is like that little rhyme from our childhood, when we interlock our fingers and speak of the church: "Here's the church, here's the steeple, open the door, and see all the people." Mary is the Church -- not the building but the sacred assembly of believers gathered around Jesus as he comes to us in Word and Sacrament.

The simple lesson of the Cross, of Sister Mary and Brother John, is that the Church and the People belong together. Let us not imagine, then, that we can be disciples of Christ, but absent from Church. You folks do not need to worry about that, since you are here. I just want to praise you and encourage you to think that in being here, you are where Christ wants you to be. He wants his disciples to be where he himself is present, loved, and proclaimed: that is, in the Church. Jesus entrusts John to Mary. He entrusts his disciples somewhere.

As for Mary, she does have many of the characteristics of the Church. Let me mention just three: she commends her Son to others, she seeks his presence and cannot be frightened off from him, and she mourns his death.

First, she commends her Son. That is a chief trait of Mary and must always be a chief trait of the Church:

Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. (John 2:5, KJV)

This is her continual sermon. Both Mary and the Church speak of Jesus, offering both hope and guidance to the world by speaking of Jesus.

Second, Mary is present for the highly priestly work of Jesus on the Cross, for his prayer of intercession, "Father, forgive," and for the offering of his life on the Cross as the sure ground of his intercession. And so it is with the Church. The world might abandon Jesus and flee. The world might mock and revile him. The world might even crucify him. But Mary remains with him, at the foot of the Cross, and so the Church must always seek the presence of Christ, where he gives his body, his blood, for you, for me. There is no Church that does not stick close to the Cross of Christ. What good is Mary without her Son? What good is the Church without her Son?

And the third trait of Mary that rings true now is that she grieves for her Son. Simeon's sword is piercing her soul as she watches Jesus. And I do believe that sword is piercing your soul too as you think on the death of Jesus. We would have to be sticks or stones to feel no grief at the death of Jesus when we ponder that he dies this death that we might not be lost in death, but have eternal life through him.

It would break my heart if one of my sons were dying. Certainly it would break Carol's heart to see such a terrible thing. God grant that they have long and happy

lives. God grant that to all children. Mary beheld something mothers should never have to see. But in seeing what she did see, she was beholding the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world. She beheld that great deed of love by which our salvation is won, through the grace and merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.