

The Sweet Sword of Suffering

Lent and the paradox of sorrow with Our Lady and G. K. Chesterton

A Guide for Our 2026 Lenten Journey

This Lent, we will follow the Blessed Mother to Calvary through her Seven Sorrows. We'll meditate upon the paradoxical mystery of redemptive suffering and learn how to unite our own sorrows to the Cross of Christ.

We will provide a **weekly Scripture** to reflect on Our Lady's participatory suffering, as well as **wisdom from Chesterton** help us experience our own trials in light of his spirituality, rich with an appreciation for paradox. During each week, we will embrace the quiet of the season, and practice the art of **meditating imaginatively upon God's Word**.

OUR INSPIRATION

The Paradox of Suffering

"I know that real good has come of the endurance of pain."

- G.K. Chesterton

Suffering, for the Christian, is a paradox and a mystery. God does not promise Christians that we will not suffer. But He does, by His grace, transform our suffering, making it powerful and meaningful for our own sanctification and for the redemption of the world. As the author of the letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament reminded his audience, "the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives" (Hebrews 12:6). We should rejoice in our sufferings, seeing in them signs that we are truly children of God.

Through suffering, the Christian soul is more closely conformed to the image of Jesus Christ who, though without sin, suffered death, even death on a cross, to redeem the world. Christians may face persecution and the sword; Christians will and must bear their own crosses. But this very suffering becomes the sword they wield: not to dole out death, but life, uniting their own struggles to the Cross of Christ.



OUR THEME

The Queen of Sorrows

Mary was the one disciple who understood beyond all others how to unite our own sufferings with those of Christ.

From early in Jesus's life, Mary knew not only that her son was marked for suffering, but that she would suffer alongside Him. She had heard this from the lips of Simeon in the Temple, when Jesus was only a few weeks old:

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 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also) that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

Luke 2:34-5



Mary knew every suffering in Christ's life, even those hidden from us: every skinned knee and bruised toe commonplace in childhood. She tended and accompanied Him with a mother's perfect love, kissing hurts away and drying tears.

Mary also witnesses Christ's public ministry: saw Him risking the traps of the Pharisees and Scribes, the attempts by crowds to capture or kill Him. She saw His rejection by unbelievers and His sorrow at their lack of faith. She saw His mourning at the deaths of His foster-father Joseph and of His friend Lazarus. And she saw His ultimate betrayal by one of His chosen close friends whom He loved.

She followed Him along the way of the Cross, and stood beneath the gibbet as He breathed His last. She held His broken body in her loving arms when He was taken down from the Cross, just as she had held Him so many times from infancy! And at last she helped prepare the body of her own son for burial.

In all these sufferings, she felt her own pain as any mother would. But she also knew that her son was destined not merely to suffer: she saw life beyond even the grave, with perfect faith and hope!

The Seven Sorrows of Mary

- The Prophecy of Simeon (*Luke 2:29-35*)
- The Flight into Egypt (*Matthew 2:13-21*)
- The Loss of Jesus for Three Days (*Luke 2:41-52*)
- The Carrying of the Cross (*John 19:15-17*)
- The Crucifixion of Jesus (*John 19:18-30*)
- Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross (*John 19: 32-40*)
- Jesus is Laid in the Tomb (*John 19:39-42*)

Devotion to the Seven Sorrows of Mary became popular in the 13th century. However, honoring Mary's sorrowful participation in Christ's suffering dates from the early Church, and is grounded in the prophecy of Simeon in Luke 2.

The Church celebrates the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows on September 15.

"From Mary we learn to surrender to God's will in all things. From Mary, we learn to trust even when all hope seems gone. From Mary, we learn to love Christ, her son and the Son of God."

St. Pope John Paul II

OUR APPROACH

Meditating on God's Word

Each week's email will serve as the basis for that week's meditation and reflection. We will encourage participants to revisit the chosen Scripture daily throughout each week, and pray with it using the method of *lectio divina*.

This ancient practice is rich, rewarding, and very simple. It involves four stages:

LECTIO

Read the scripture slowly and carefully, multiple times, and note any particular phrases or words that start to catch your attention and “speak” to you.

MEDITATIO

Meditate upon the scripture. Imaginatively enter into the scripture by focusing on whatever caught your attention in the first step. Start by thinking about the scene, the words in their setting and context, and what they meant to those who first heard them.

Then turn your eye inward, to yourself. *Ask yourself:* What is God trying to say to me right now through His Word? How does His Word challenge or encourage me?

ORATIO

Pray in response to God's word. He has spoken to you, now speak to Him. Has His Word led you to ask forgiveness? To thank Him? To beg Him for a certain grace or favor? To resolve upon a certain deed? Tell God about it, and trust that He hears you.

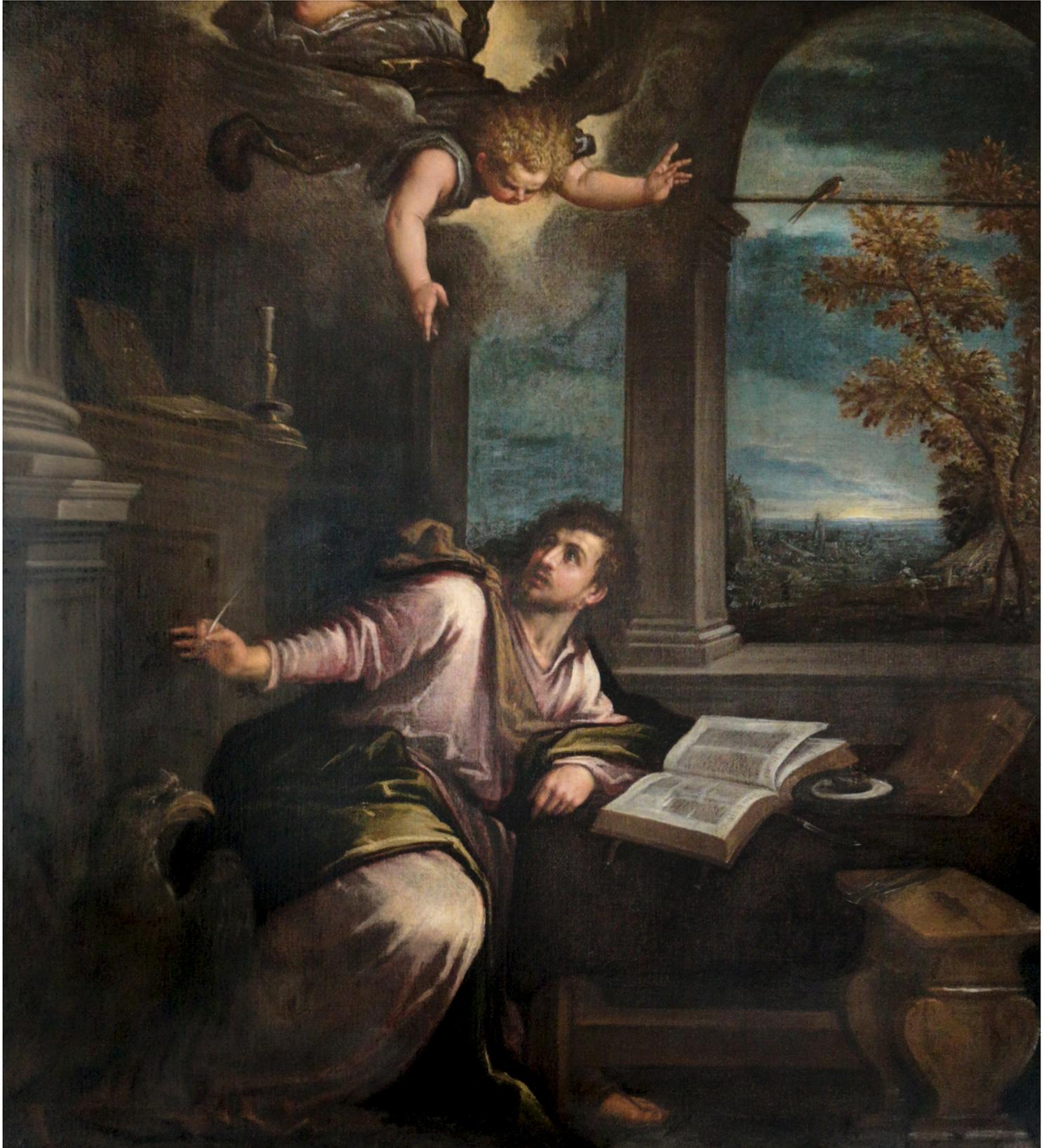
CONTEMPLATIO

Contemplate God's holy presence. This can be the hardest step, but also the most fruitful.

Rest in the knowledge that God has spoken to you. Sit in God's presence and try to be silent. You have seen that God's Word is alive and active; now let that Word grow in your heart. You have spoken to God; now let the Holy Spirit speak within you.

Artwork symbolically representing the stages of *lectio divina* are details taken from “Saint John the Evangelist Writing the Apocalypse” by Paolo Veronese, ca. 1580-90; Fresco, Doge's Palace San Marco, Venice, Italy. See next page for full image.

Have a blessed Lent!



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