

VIA MATRIS DOLOROSAE

CELEBRATION
OF
OUR LADY'S SORROWFUL JOURNEY

ROMAE
CURIA GENERALIS OSM
MCMXCIX

MARIALE SERVORUM
7

HUBERT M. MOONS
PRIOR GENERALIS
ORDINIS SERVORUM MARIAE

AVE MARIA

Prot 73/97

To the friars of the Order
and the brothers and sisters
of the Servite Family,

Via Matris, “the Way of the Mother”: the metaphor of life as a journey applies to Mary of Nazareth as well – it applies to her in an eminent fashion. The Virgin’s life was the journey of a mother, a disciple and a woman overwhelmed with sorrow.

The journey of a mother. After her generous assent to Gabriel’s message, the *fiat*, Mary – with the Son in her womb – hastened to the hill country of Judah to exchange the gift of Messianic grace with Elizabeth and to offer her a service of love, The precursor would meet the Savior, the Prophet would rejoice at the coming of the Messiah and the Spirit would descend on the house of Zachary, the priest. It was the first Pentecost in the New Testament (cf. *Lk* 1, 39-56). From then on this would be Mary’s life: the Mother’s journey, like that of her Son was service: going about doing good (cf. *Acts* 10, 38; *Jn* 2, 1-12).

The journey of a disciple. After the first sign of her Son’s glory the mother became one of his disciples: she followed the Master (cf. *Jn* 23, 11-12); she trod the “narrow path” relentlessly (*Mt* 7,

14); she took up the mystery of the cross daily (cf. *Lk* 9, 23); she followed Jesus right up to Calvary where her Son, the Lamb, was sacrificed, where her Son, the teacher, converted the cross into a pulpit from which he delivered the last lesson of the Gospel of life.

The journey of a woman of sorrow. This was the journey of Mary of Nazareth, a woman overwhelmed by the mystery of sorrow. Her journey began with a pilgrimage to the Temple where Simeon, a God-fearing man, uttered enigmatic words about the destiny of her Son and her own life – a life that would be marked with the mystery of the sword (cf. *Lk* 2, 34-35). Her journey continued with a mid-night flight to a foreign land because her baby was threatened with death (cf. *Mt* 2, 13). In anguish she sought the young Son she had lost sight of in Jerusalem (cf. *Lk* 2, 41-49). Once more she sought him on the crowded streets of Jerusalem – he was now a famous rabbi and the crowd was almost crushing him (Cf. *Mk* 3,9) and the authorities had rejected him with calumnies (cf. *Mk* 3, 22-30). She followed his footsteps up the hill of Calvary – the *Via Crucis* and the *Via Matris* came together, a sign of the love and suffering that united the Mother to the Son.

Our Lady's sufferings were many. Devotion has singled out seven – a symbolic number that indicates totality. These seven became the *Via Matris* – a parallel to the *Via Crucis* – in the nineteenth century and the Order adopted this devotion as part of Servite spirituality.

In its effort to revise the Order's Marian devotions the International Liturgical Commission (CLIOS) undertook substantial historical research before approaching the *Via Matris*. CLIOS has proposed five versions of this devotion: I. Mother and Disciple, on the Way of the Cross; II. With Mary a journey of faith and suffering; III. "*Via Matris*" Our Lady's journey of love; IV. "*Via Matris*" a journey of life and service; V. Mary's journey of suffering and discipleship.

The General Council examined and revised these five versions and found them in conformity with the principles set out in the Apostolic Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (art. 13) and appropriate expressions of devotion, the spirituality of the Order and the values of our tradition. The Council has approved them unanimously (Prot. 515/89).

Given the approval of the General Council I decree that these versions should be included in the *Mariale Servorum* – the collection of devotional formulas that best express Servite Marian devotion.

I am confident that the renewed *Via Matris* will benefit all of you and especially those in service at sanctuaries dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows. It will constitute a valuable aid for expressing your devotion to the Queen of Martyrs. Essentially this devotion (meditation on the sorrows of Mary) provides another way to share in the passion of Christ which continues in the suffering of mankind. This devotion will help us understand and relieve human suffering (cf. *Const. OSM*, 7).

Rome, from our Priory of San Marcello, February 2, 1997, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

L. + S.

Fra Hubert M. MOONS, O.S.M.
Prior General

Fra Reinhold M. BODNER, O.S.M.
Secretary of the Order

INTRODUCTION

1. The *Via Matris dolorosae*, or simply, the *Via Matris* is a devotion in which a group of people or a single individual walks along a stretch or road or inside a church and meditates on the sufferings Mary endured during life in her mission of as mother of and cooperator with the Savior.

2. The *Via Matris* began outside the Order of friar Servants of St. Mary but the place it found in our hearts and the love with which we have spread this devotion among the faithful makes it one that belongs to the Order – and through the Order to the whole Servite Family.

3. Other devotions involve meditation on the Mary's sorrows and walking with the *Via Matris* – but they cannot be properly called the *Via Matris*. Examples of such devotions are:

- the *Via Crucis* with Mary as our guide on the road to Calvary concentrating on Mary's feelings at various stages of the journey – the fourteen stations – of her Son's passion;¹

- the journey of seven stations followed by "Mary, desolate after the most holy body of her divine Son was closed in the sepulcher" (first station) up to arriving at John's house in Jerusalem where "Mary felt the passion and death of her Son day and night" (sixth station) and where she "endured the loss of her people and of so many souls in spite of her Son's death" (seventh station).²

I. HISTORICAL PROFILE

4. The origins of the *Via Matris* are obscure. It was certainly an imitation of the *Via Crucis*, a devotion that had firm roots among Christians. The *Via Crucis* evolved in the late Middle Ages in an atmosphere of devotion to the mystery of Christ's passion, enthusiasm for the recovery of the Holy Sepulcher, renewed pilgrimages to the Holy Land and the desire to reproduce at home the *Via Sacra* in Jerusalem.

But the path Jesus, the Son, trod from Pilate's tribunal to Calvary was trod by Mary the Mother, as well. To a large extent it was a shared journey: some of the stations in the *Via Crucis* and the *Via Matris* coincide. From this perspective the *Via Crucis* is also a *Via Matris*.

Since Mary's whole life – her journey – was marked by suffering Christians have joined the two *Viae* conceptually and celebrated them ritually. The key to understanding Mary's participation in the suffering of her Son was a ritual parallel to the *Via Crucis*. From the beginning of the twentieth century the devotion was often referred to as: *The Via Matris or the seven most bitter sufferings the Virgin Mary endured with meditations in the same form as those of the Via Crucis*.³

¹ E.G. A. BOSSARD. *Le chemin de croix avec Marie*. Paris, Cahiers Mariales, 1985. Italian translation: *Il cammino della croce con Maria*. Brescia. Queriniana, 1988; J. ASIAIN. *Via crucis acompañado a Maria*. Buenos Aires, Editorial Bonum, 1981.

² *Maria Desolata*. A devotion practiced in honor of Mary from Good Friday evening till Easter dawn. Published in Florence 1798 at the Stamperia di S. Maria in Campo, pp. 9, 20, 22. The seven stations cover in reverse Our Lady's journey from Jerusalem to Calvary to tomb. They are depicted as a *via sacra dolorosa* or a *via amaritudinis*. As the cover of the booklet explains they are a devotion to the *Desolata* who has lost the presence of her son once the tomb is closed.

This devotion was devised by Venerable Sister Maria Crocifissa Tomasi, the sister of St. Giuseppe Maria Tomasi (+1712). She was a Benedictine nun in the monastery of Palma (Agrigento) established in 1659 by her father, Don Giulio Tomasi, the Duke of Palma and Prince of Lampedusa. The nuns used this devotion to tread the path – in seven stages – that led from the sepulcher to John's house in Jerusalem. It was a path of loneliness and lasted about forty hours. "Devotion to Mary, *Desolata*, should last just as long [forty hours] from 11 PM Good Friday until dawn on Easter Sunday (...) During that time prayer should be continuous, we must provide perpetual company to our afflicted and desolate Lady" (pp. 5-6). For history of the devotion to the *Desolata* see DIEGO DIAS HIERRO, *Compendio histórico de la devoción a la soledad de Maria*. Separata de "El Lábito". Zaragoza, Impr. Estilo, 1959.

³ Rome, Tipografia Salviucci, 1855. The same title – less the adjective *medesima* [same] in another booklet: *Via Matris ossia I sette acerbissimi dolori di Maria Vergine meditati nella forma della "Via Crucis"*. Rome, Tipografia Artigianelli S. Giuseppe, 1906.

Antecedents of the *Via Matris*

5. In 1628-1629 the local Confraternity of the Seven Sorrows erected seven “stations” in Malines, Belgium. Six were around the exterior of the city cathedral and the seventh was inside the church. We read this in *Relazione del IV centenario della fondazione della Confraternità dei Sette Dolori celebrato a Malines A.D. 1885*. The article is signed Pamos – probably Father Agostino M. Morini (+1909).⁴ The fact that the seventh station was found inside the church indicates that devotion to Our Lady of Seven Sorrows was widespread in Flanders and very much appreciated by ecclesiastical authorities. It’s not entirely clear, however, that we can connect these seven stations to the *Via Matris* as we know it today.

6. Without any specific evidence scholars of popular devotion claim a Spanish origin for the *Via Matris*; if the devotion did not originate there it was certainly widespread in that country. Certainly focus in Spain and dependencies of the Spanish Crown in the Americas (XVII and XVIII centuries) on the Passion of Christ and the sufferings of the Blessed Virgin was intense and widespread. Abundant devotional literature is evidence of this.

An antecedent of the *Via Matris* is the procession established in 1661 by the Servite Community in Barcelona. On Palm Sunday seven “*pasos*” (floats representing sacred scenes) moved through the streets near the Servite Church. These “*pasos*” represented the seven sorrows of the Blessed Virgin.⁵ The Barcelona procession already involves two elements characteristic of the *Via Matris*: the seven sorrows of Our Lady in chronological sequence and the “journey” as a ritual expression.

7. Another antecedent of the *Via Matris* can be detected in the friars’ custom of hanging seven pictures some place in the priory – corridor, cloister, chapter room – or in the church. The pictures represent the seven sorrows of the Blessed Virgin in chronological order. This practice was certainly involved with devotional practices. This series of pictures need not necessarily have provided the structure for a journey of seven stations – something that only later became the *Via Matris*.

A relevant example of this custom can be found at Monte Senario. On April 4, 1717, after extensive renovation, Msgr. Giovanni Francesco Poggi, the Bishop of San Miniato (Pisa) – former Prior General of the Servite Order – consecrated the church and dedicated it to Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows and St. Philip Benizi.⁶ Since it was dedicated to Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows it seemed only natural that images of these sorrows would be found in the church. Ten years later, on May 21, 1727, the Rector, Fra Arcangelo M. Meini had six pictures representing the six sorrows of Our Lady⁷ placed in the church. The fifth sorrow – the Crucifixion of her Son – was represented by the polychrome stucco crucifix of Ferdinando Tacca⁸ which can still be found above the main altar in

⁴ In *L’Addolorata* 1 (1897) pp. 78-80.

⁵ Cf. *Annales OSM*, III, pp. 242-243; D.M. CHARBONEAU. *The Servites of Barcelona in Studi Storici OSM* 30 (1980) pp. 22-23; V. LORENTE PEREZ. *La Provincia Española O.S.M. en el s. XVII según un manuscrito de Fco. Epifanio Cedó*. Roma, Pontificia Facultad Teológica “Marianum” 1995 [unpublished paper presented for a diploma in Servite History and Spirituality], 48 pages. On pp. 23-25 there is a description of the procession of the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin written by Fra Francisco Epifanio Cedó, Vicar General of the Spanish Province.

⁶ An inscription in marble to the left of the church entrance records the happy event: “...Io. Fran. M. Poggi [...] consecravit ecclesiam hanc S[acri] E[remi] M[ontis] S[enarii] eiusq. Altare maius in honorem B.M.V. septem Dolorum et divi P. Philippi Beniti.” This inscription is reproduced in *Guida storico-descrittiva di Montesenario*. Terni, Prem.Stab. Alterocca, 1911, p. 57.

⁷ Cf. Monte Senario, Conventual Archives. *Memorie del sacro Eremo di Monte Senario [1725-1765]*, p. 6 (Cf. *Studi Storici OSM* 29 [1979] pp. 325-326). For information on the six pictures – where they were placed and who painted them – see the manuscript *Memorie dell’origine et progressi degli Eremi della Congregazione di Monte Senario, dell’Ordine de’Servi di Maria Vergine, estratto dagli Annali del medesimo Ordine e dalle antiche memorie esistenti negli archivi de’ predetti Eremi*. Scritte da un Eremita del Monte Senario l’anno MDCCLX, pp. 727-730.

⁸ Cf. L.M. DE VITTORIO. *Restaurato il’Crocifisso’ del 1647 di Ferdinando Tacca per Monte Senario*, in *Studi Storici*

the Monte Senario church: Jesus crucified with his mother and the beloved disciple on either side of him.

The “Via Matris” And Servite devotion to the Sorrowful Mother

8. Whatever its origin the *Via Matris* fits into the Servite devotional movement to Our Lady of Sorrows. Traces of this devotion can be found as far back as the *Legenda de origine Ordinis*⁹ and would grow considerably in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. During this time an especially significant event with rich cultic consequences occurred: with the approval of Innocent XII the Sacred Congregation of Rites promulgated the decree *Cum Sacrorum* (August 9, 1692). Fra Giovanni Francesco M. Poggi, Prior General of the Servite Order, had requested this decree which recognized Our Lady of Sorrows and devotion to the seven sorrows of the Virgin as “a devotion that belongs to the aforementioned Order and is its principal characteristic.”¹⁰ The decree was the crowning point of a long process in which various devotions to the Sorrowful Mother – both liturgical and popular – had emerged and been firmly recognized. At the same time it was a point of departure and gave rise to other devotional exercises in honor of the Queen of Martyrs.

The “Via Matris” And the Roman community of San Marcello al Corso

9. In the first half of the nineteenth century the Roman community of San Marcello al Corso became a center that contributed to the popularity of this devotion, the *Via Matris*. In 1836 the *Via Matris* was erected in the church; every Friday in Lent the devotion was practiced and ever growing crowds attended.

One year later, July 13, 1837, Gregory XVI issued a brief, *Cum sane laudabilis*, which stated that: “in some churches in the Christian world the very praiseworthy and healthy practice of commemorating the sorrows of the Virgin Mother of God on specific days, with specific prayers and with practice called the Stations of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary.” The Pope judged this to be “an appropriate exercise to be encouraged; it will increase Christian piety and lead to eternal salvation” and for this reason he enriched it with “special indulgences.”¹¹

OSM 40 (1990) pp. 87-92.

⁹ “[Blessed Peter of Verona] further asserted that the habit friars of our Order wore and would wear forever reflected the humility of the Virgin Mary and clearly symbolized the sorrow she endured in the very bitter passion of her Son” (52: *Monumenta OSM*, I, p. 98). Two Dominicans asked St. Philip Benizi what Order was represented by the habits he and Fra Vittore – his traveling companion – wore. The Saint answered: “We call ourselves Servants of the Glorious Virgin and we wear her widow’s weeds” (*Legenda beati Philippi*, 8: *Monumenta OSM*, II, p. 71).

¹⁰ *Annales OSM*, III, p. 359. In 1992, the third centenary of the promulgation of this decree, Fra Hubert M. Moons, the Prior General, published a letter: *Con Maria accanto alla Croce* [With Mary at the Foot of the Cross] Rome, Curia Generale dei frati Servi di Maria, 1992. The letter presents a good synthesis and evaluation of the development of devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries (pp. 7-14). For a general overview see: G.M. BESUTTI. *Pietà e dottrina mariana nell’Ordine dei Servi di Maria nei secoli XV e XVI*. Rome, Edizioni “Marianum”, 1984, especially pp. 85-113; *La pietà verso l’Addolorata fra I Servi di Maria nel ‘600*, in VARIOUS AUTHORS. *I Servi di Maria nel Seicento (Da fra Angelo Montorsoli a fra Giulio Arrighetti)*. Edizioni Monte Senario 1985, pp. 105-131; *Gli sviluppi della pietà verso la Vergine dei dolori nel ‘700 Servitano* in VARIOUS AUTHORS. *I Servi di Maria nel Settecento (Da fra G.F.Poggi alle soppressioni napoleoniche)*. Edizioni Monte Senario 1986, pp. 107-152. Given the circumstances references to the *Via Matris* in these very worthwhile studies are few – almost non-existent.

¹¹ Our translation of this Brief is taken from the booklet *I sette acerbissimi dolori di Maria meditati nella forma medesima della Via Crucis*. Rome. Tipografia Marini e Compagno, 1842, p. 24. With regard to the indulgences, Gregory XVI granted “a plenary indulgence and remission of their sins to the faithful who were genuinely contrite and who visited seven times – on specific days – one of those churches where the Stations of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary are found and who carried out the other works of piety recommended and who asked God to grant concord to Christian princes. Those who performed the *Via Matris* only once would be granted seven years and seven

The *Via Matris* as practiced in San Marcello al Corso church in Rome became very popular. The booklet containing the devotion went through several editions in Rome and in other cities of Italy;¹² beginning with the 1852 edition the *Via Matris* was included in *Breve notizia dell'abito e corona dei sette dolori*, a classical manual of devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows compiled by Father Giovanni Maria Pecoroni.¹³

10. In a letter dated September 19, 1849, to the Procurator of the Order, Fra Bonfiglio M. Mura, the Prior General, Fra Gaetano M. Bensi (1847-1853) expressed his interest in and respect for the *Via Matris*. He writes from Perugia: “It seems a good thing to me that this devotion, the *Via Matris*, should be recognized as belonging to our Order. You must obtain for us the faculty necessary to authorize its erection by all who should ask for it.”¹⁴ In Bensi’s letter it is worth noting that he wants this devotion to be “recognized as belonging to our Order.” We do not have the Procurator General’s response. However we know that this idea was not abandoned. Some thirty years later the Prior General, Fra Pierfrancesco M. Testa (1882-1888) took the *Via Matris Dolorosae* devotion to heart. In 1883 he had a rite composed for erecting the “stations” of the *Via Matris*. At his request Leo XIII reserved the faculty to erect the “stations” of the *Via Matris* to the Prior General of the Order or to his delegate (Brief *Deiparae Perdolentis*, May 8, 1883).¹⁵ With this intervention of Leo XIII and because it fit in so well with their spirituality, the *Via Matris* which began outside the Order had become a specifically Servite expression of Marian devotion.

The same Prior General included the *Via Matris* in the rule and manual for brothers and sisters of the Servite Third Order published in 1884.¹⁶ The Order was making this pious exercise available to all those laypeople following Christ within the framework of Servite spirituality.

11. An extraordinary turn of events occurred in Chicago in the 1930s. On January 8, 1937 – a Friday – Father James M. Keane began conducting the *Via Matris* in Our Lady of Sorrows Basilica. So many people attended that the service had to be repeated several times on the following Friday, January 15. This went on for many years. Every Friday from 7 AM until 10 PM the *Via Matris* was conducted at brief intervals all day long. Initially the faithful were invited to repeat the practice for nine successive Fridays and then the idea of a Perpetual Novena took root: people who had completed nine Fridays could then begin again and continue the practice without interruption. The Perpetual Novena sponsored a bulletin called *Novena Notes* and the Chicago church became a center for the national propagation of devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows.¹⁷

The Perpetual Novena spread to the neighboring Canadian Servite Province. On December 2, 1938 the novena was introduced in St. Anthony Parish in Ottawa¹⁸; it then spread to Montreal and was especially well attended in the Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel community.

quarantines.” (p. 24).

¹² Cf. P.M. PITZEN, *Research on the Via Matris Being a Selective Bibliography*. [Unpublished paper written for the Diploma in Mariology. Marianum Theological Faculty, 1966] especially pp. 1-6.

¹³ *Breve notizia dell'abito e corona de' sette dolori col modo di praticare la divozione de' sette venerdì in onore della ss. Vergine Addolorata ...* compiled by Father Francesco Maria Pecoroni. Naples, Stabilimento Tipografico di A. Festa, 1852, pp. 86-94.

¹⁴ The letter can be found in the Servite General Archives in Rome. It is in a folder with no specific location. The folder is labeled – provisionally – Letters to Procurators General.

¹⁵ Text in *Acta Leonis XIII*, III. Rome, Typographia Vaticana, 1884, pp. 220-222.

¹⁶ *Regola e manuale dei fratelli e sorelle del Terz'Ordine dei Servi di Maria*. Rome, Tipografia Poliglotta della S.C. di Propaganda Fide, 1884, pp. 417-425.

¹⁷ An account of this phenomenon can be found in *Acta OSM* 8 (1937-139) pp. 183-185: *Singularis devotio erga B. Virginem Perdolentem per exercitium "Viae Matris" Chicagiae excitata*. For an historical profile of the origin, evolution and decline of the Perpetual Novena in Chicago, Cf. J.M. HUELS, *The Friday Night Novena. The Growth and Decline of the Sorrowful Mother Novena*. Berwyn, Illinois, Eastern Province of Servites, 1977.

¹⁸ Ottawa, Conventual Archives. *Cronaca dell'anno 1938*, December 2nd entry.

II. SPIRITUAL VALUES

12. The *Via Matris* is a pious exercise in which Christians meditate on the Blessed Virgin's life journey while walking. It is a metaphor for life as a journey – point of departure, mid-journey, final goal – a pattern reflected in the life of Mary of Nazareth.

Theological Foundation

13. Like every Marian devotion the theological foundation of the *Via Matris* is Mary's indissoluble union to Christ in carrying out God's plan of salvation. This plan finds its highest expression in the incarnation of the Word and in the death and resurrection of Christ. The Virgin is the "*intimissima socia* [most intimate associate]"¹⁹ in carrying out the work of redemption. Since Christ Crucified and Our Lady of Sorrows are associated in the plan of salvation they are similarly associated in liturgical celebrations and acts of popular devotion.

Our Lady's journey

14. The fundamental insight of the *Via Matris* is that Mary's entire life from the Annunciation (cf. *Lk* 1, 26-38) and the Prophecy of Simeon (cf. *Lk* 2, 34-35) to the death and burial of her Son is a journey of faith²⁰ and suffering. The *Via Matris* breaks down this journey into seven "stations" that correspond to seven episodes in Mary's life that the Christian people see as her seven main "sorrows."

15. The Gospels are not biography but rather the narration and proclamation of the work of salvation and of the grace-filled words of Jesus sent by the Father and full of the Holy Spirit. But still they tell us of various journeys undertaken by Jesus and Mary of Nazareth, his mother. About Mary they have told us the following:

- *journey of the Daughter of Zion* (the Ark of the New Covenant: the Word is present within her) who goes to Zachary the Priest's house to proclaim the saving work of God (*mirabilia Dei*) and to bring Christ to John. She is, in this way, the first evangelist of the Kingdom and the new covenant (cf. *Lk* 1, 39-55);

- *journey of the pregnant woman*, from Nazareth to Bethlehem (cf. *Lk* 2, 1-7) where she experiences the pain of giving birth to her Son (*Lk* 2,7);

- *journey of a devout Jew* who goes to Jerusalem to offer her Child (*Lk* 2, 23) and there from the lips of Simeon (*Lk* 2, 25) hears the prophecy about what will happen to her son (*Lk* 2, 34-35) and to herself (*Lk* 2, 35);

- *journey of the exile* who must flee her native land with Joseph and the Child to save the life of her Son who is persecuted by the powerful (cf. *Mt* 2, 13-15) and then when the danger is passed returns with them to Galilee (*Mt* 2, 23);

- *journey of the pilgrim* who goes to Jerusalem for Passover every year (cf. *Lk* 2, 41) and when Jesus is twelve years old loses and finds him (death and resurrection, cf. *Lk* 2, 43) – a painful and prophetic episode; Jesus reveals his mission: he must be carry out his Father's saving plan (cf. *Lk* 2, 49);

- *journey of a friend* who goes to the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee, an occasion when her Son will reveal his glory as the Messianic Spouse and his disciples will believe in him (cf. *Jn* 2, 1-11) and whence she will accompany her son and his disciples to Capernaum (cf. *Jn* 2, 12);

¹⁹ Cf. PAUL VI. Apostolic Exhortation *Signum magnum* in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59 (1967) p. 146 (EV 2, 1179).

²⁰ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 58; JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, 14.

- *journey of a caring mother* – it appears she is looking for her Son and says she is his mother (*Mk* 3, 21); this whole episode is obscure and difficult to interpret; she learns that accepting the Word is more important than biological motherhood (cf. *Mk* 3, 31-35);

- *journey of a faithful disciple*: following the rule of discipleship she follows Jesus up to Calvary to be beside her Son-and-Teacher (cf. *Jn* 19, 25-27) as he gives his life for the salvation of mankind; Christian devotion has added another event to this journey up Calvary – the transition from the place of crucifixion to the nearby garden where a new tomb was waiting (cf. *Jn* 19, 41-42).

Community Prayer

16. The *Via Matris* has as its point of reference the *Via Crucis* which can be prayed privately but was originally a community act.

This is true for the *Via Matris* as well: it can be performed by a single individual as a private act of devotion but more often – and preferably – it should be performed by groups that have come together specifically for this purpose; different individuals would play distinct roles: the leader, the reader and the assembly.

Biblical Prayer

17. Like the *Via Crucis*, the *Via Matris* is a “Biblical prayer;” the sorrows to be contemplated derive from the Gospel and the Church’s tradition.

18. It would be too much of a limitation to meditate only on the episodes in the Gospel – although they are rich in insight. Each episode is foreshadowed by events in the Old Testament and is linked to other events in the New Testament. For example the mystery of the “persecuted infancy” in the second station is a conventional Biblical theme: Moses the future Lawgiver and Mediator of the Covenant is persecuted as an infant (cf. *Ex* 1, 18 – 2, 10; *Acts* 7, 17-21); Israel – the son of God (*Hos* 11,1) – was persecuted by the Pharaohs in its infancy (cf. *Ex* 14, 5-31); in his infancy Jesus, the Messiah and Savior, is persecuted by Herod (cf. *Mt* 2, 13-18); we find in the Acts of the Apostles accounts of the Church’s persecution in her infancy (cf. *Acts* 4, 1-21; 5, 17-33; 6, 8; 8, 1); predictions of this persecution can be found in the symbolic language of the Apocalypse: “Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born [...] So when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child (*Apoc* 12, 4. 13; Cf. 6, 9-11).

19. The sorrows that afflict the lives of Jesus and Mary are a consummation of the sorrow that has weighed on humankind since its origins because of the mysterious “rupture” between God and man in the beginning (cf. *Gen* 3, 1-17) and the many successive acts of unfaithfulness to the Covenant:

- Christ is the “Suffering Servant” who “took up our sufferings and took upon himself our sorrows” (*Isa* 53, 4; cf. *Mt* 8, 17); through the mystery of the incarnation and in his role as Head of Mankind he share mysteriously in all human suffering, past, present and future (cf. *Mt* 25, 35-40);

- Mary is the “Woman of Sorrow” – so she is called in Church tradition, in the liturgical offices and pious devotions; the lament of the Daughter of Zion is placed on her lips: “All you who pass by look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow” (*Lam* 1, 12a).

Christological Orientation

20. Although a Marian devotion the *Via Matris* has a Christological orientation. “In the Virgin Mary everything relates to and is dependent on Christ.”²¹ All her sorrows are linked to the “mystery

²¹ PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, 25.

of the Passion” of her Son. This mystery marked his childhood and public life; it reached its culmination on the cross: youth and public life were determined by and acquire meaning from the cross. They are linked to the cross and provide saving efficacy for the life of the Church and for individual Christians. As the liturgy puts it:

A single love associates Son and Mother

A single sorrow joins them

A single will moves them:

To please you [Father] the only and greatest good.²²

21. During the course of his life Christ’s sufferings became ever more intense; they were moving ever closer to the supreme suffering of death on the cross: “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified.” (*Mt* 20, 18-19).

Similarly Our Lady’s sufferings became gradually more intense: from the prophecy of Simeon about her Son’s future, “a sign of contradiction” (*Lk* 2, 34) to the hour of the cross (cf. *Jn* 13, 1) the culmination of her association to the saving passion of her Son.

22. The celebration of the *Via Matris* should highlight its Easter aspect. Several of the stations make significant reference to the Paschal Mystery: in the First Station (Mary receives in faith the prophecy of Simeon) we hear words of death and life “He is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel” (*Lk* 2, 34). In the Second Station (Mary flees into Egypt with Jesus and Joseph) we see a prophetic flight and return, the threat of death from a tyrant and the protection of the Father. The Third Station presents an evocative image (Mary searches for Jesus left behind in Jerusalem): the three days he was lost recall the three days in the tomb.

The saving events recalled in the Fourth Station (Mary meets Jesus on the road to Calvary), the Fifth Station (Mary stands at the foot of her Son’s cross), the Sixth Station (Mary receives the dead body of her Son on her lap) and the Seventh Station (Mary deposits the body of Jesus in the tomb and awaits the resurrection).

23. Christ’s death and resurrection are intimately connected. They are the essential nucleus of the Paschal Mystery, the single and inseparable salvation event.

While profoundly involved in contemplation of the Paschal Mystery the *Via Matris* does not include Christ’s resurrection. It leaves this to other devotions. The *Via Matris* has a specific perspective – celebration of the Queen of Heaven.

24. Two facts explain this:

- “cultic historicization” – a phenomenon with deep roots –tends to distinguish and celebrate separately the various episodes that make up the single Paschal Mystery and consider in detail every aspect of Christ’s humanity;

- at the time the *Via Matris* evolved: there was a strong emphasis on the passion of Christ. Devotion to the Passion of Christ and the Com-passion of the Blessed Virgin reached its culmination.

25. But the *Via Matris* does not exclude the Easter event – discreetly but clearly it leaves an opening to the resurrection.

The Seventh Station is described as “Mary deposits the body of Jesus in the tomb and awaits the resurrection.” According to sound tradition Mary is the faithful disciple, the mother who believes the words of her Son, Jesus: “The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the

²² CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP. *Collectio missarum de beata Maria Virgine*. Editio typica. Form 7. *Santa Maria nella Presentazione del Signore*, preface. Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1987, p. 30.

elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (*Lk 9, 22*; cf. *Lk 11, 27-28*).

The resurrection of the Lord is mentioned several times in the *Dismissal*:

- the admonition recalls the Mother’s faith in the resurrection of her Son:

The Virgin’s journey
did not end in the darkness of the tomb.
with living faith
the Mother believed that her son
as he had said
would rise from the dead;

- the closing prayer seeks a final grace for those who have celebrated the *Via Matris*:

The joy and certain hope
of being associated to the glory of the Risen Christ

- the final blessing is typically Paschal in tone:

May God, who with the resurrection of his Son
has scattered the darkness of this world
enlighten your hearts with the light of Easter
and grant them peace.

Ecclesial Orientation

26. As the Gospels describe them Our Lady’s “sorrows” are not private facts: they are events in the history of salvation. We recall the words of the 208th General Chapter of the Order in its document on promoting devotion to Mary: “There is no Gospel episode about Mary that cannot and should not be interpreted without reference to the mystery of Christ and the Church.”²³

27. From ancient times theology has emphasized the relationship of example that exists between Mary of Nazareth and the Church. In our own day the Council, Papal teaching and the liturgy have all given authoritative voice to this doctrine using a variety of formulas: through her constant faith response to the Lord, her fruitful virginity, her spousal love, her life of worship, her apostolic commitment and her final glory Mary is the *type, form, figure, exemplar* and *image* of the Church. We could add that the trials and the suffering she endured during her earthly pilgrimage are yet other reflections of the Church.²⁴

28. In an attentive celebration of the *Via Matris* it is not difficult to discern the ecclesial significance of Mary’s sorrow and to see how that sorrow continues to accompany the Church on its journey. Mary was the exiled mother whose Child is persecuted by the powerful, the courageous mother of a Son misunderstood by relatives, rejected by fellow townsmen, opposed by religious authorities, abandoned by his disciples, led to the gibbet and crucified with criminals. She is the Strong and Faithful Woman who inspires the Church in her hour of trial when the Lord and his word are derided, her children persecuted and her mission thwarted.

The Virgin at the foot of the cross and the Mother whose dead Son lies on her knees are the symbol and icon of the Church whose divine mission is to stand with those who suffer and to gather to her bosom mankind’s sufferings and afflictions.

Anthropology

²³ 208th GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE ORDER OF SERVANTS OF MARY. *Do what he tells you*. Thoughts and proposals for promoting devotion to Mary. 36. Rome, General Curia OSM, 1983, p. 41.

²⁴ Cf. ST. AUGUSTINE, *De civitate Dei*, XVIII, 41, 2: *Patrologia Latina* 41, 604; SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 8; JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, 25.

29. The *Via Matris* lingers in loving contemplation of the sorrowful journey of Christ and Our Lady. The Lord Jesus, the new and perfect man, had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect (*Heb 2, 17*) and “who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin” (*Heb 4, 15*) shared totally in the mystery of suffering and death. And like him so did his Mother, the New Woman, the first fruits of humanity without sin.

30. Man’s condition on earth is subject to suffering and moaning. Suffering is a universal and basic human experience. Men and women in every era can say with the psalmist: “... my life is spent with sorrow and my years with sighing” (*Ps 31 [30] 10*). Sacred Scripture itself is a “great book about suffering.”²⁵

We know through faith that Christ took upon himself the evil of suffering – physical and moral suffering – and then overcame and redeemed it: “With the passion of Christ,” John Paul II writes, “all human suffering has found itself in a new situation ... In the cross of Christ not only is the redemption accomplished through suffering but suffering itself is redeemed.”²⁶

31. God’s condescension makes everything work to the advantage of those who love him (cf. *Rom 8, 28*). The pain of suffering is transformed into an instrument of salvation. Realizing this we, the Servants of Mary, begin the Office of the Solemnity of Our Lady of Sorrows (September 15) with these words:

Wondrous condescension of your love!
through your only begotten Son
and through His Mother
you have transformed the pain of suffering
into an instrument of salvation.²⁷

Through faith a Christian learns that his suffering has redemptive value if associated it to the passion of Christ. He knows that like St. Paul he can make up in his flesh “what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.” (*Col 1, 24*). The Christian comes to understand Paul’s paradox – something that has been confirmed over the centuries: “I am filled with consolation; I am overjoyed in all our affliction” (*2 Cor 7, 4*). The Christian comes to recognize that through sharing in the mystery of the cross he will reach the glory of the resurrection (cf. *Rom 8, 17-18; 1 Pet 4, 13*).

32. Celebrating the *Via Matris* involves approaching the mystery of human suffering with the heart of Our Lady. Fervid contemplation of Mary’s sorrow will effectively lead us to stand with Mary at the foot of the Cross “the model” – as our Constitutions²⁸ put it – of our service. It will make our hearts more compassionate, better able to understand and share human suffering, to stand beside “those countless crosses in order to bring comfort and redemptive cooperation.”²⁹

A well led *Via Matris* service will easily lead participants from the contemplation of Mary’s Seven Sorrows to sharing in the suffering of the world.³⁰

III. FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THE “VIA MATRIS”

²⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, 6.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 19.

²⁷ *Liturgia Horarum*. Proprium Officiorum Ordinis Fratrum Servorum beatæ Mariæ Virginis. II/2. Editio typica. September 15. *Solemnity of Our Lady of Sorrows*, antiphon no. 1 at First Vespers.

²⁸ *Constitutions of the Order of Friar Servants of Mary*, 319. Buena Park, California, Servite Provincialate, 1987, p. 122.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Cf. [Hubert M. MOONS]. *Con Maria accanto alla Croce*. Lettera del Priore Generale dei Frati Servi di Maria, 15. Rome, Curia Generalizia OSM, 1992, pp. 19-21.

33. The *Via Matris* consists of seven stations corresponding to the seven sorrows Church tradition tells us the Mother of Jesus endured. Tradition has not been unanimous, however, in singling out those sorrows.

Two traditions exist about the seven sorrows of Our Lady: the first tradition concentrates the seven sorrows linked to the fundamental episode of Jesus' Crucifixion; the second covers Our Lady's whole life and includes episodes from Jesus' infancy.

The first tradition emphasizes Our Lady's *compassion* at the foot of the Cross, a Mother's *tears* at the death of her Son and her desolate *loneliness*. For example, Niccolò d'Arezzo (+ c. 1462), a Servite friar, lists the seven sorrows or as he calls them "swords" in his work *Planctus Dominae Nostrae*. All seven are linked to the Passion of Christ:

Primus gladius fuit quando vidit filium captum et ligatum; *secundus* quando eum vidit in cruce elevatum et in ligno confixum; *tertius* gladius doloris fuit quando eum vidit ab omnibus derelictum; *quartus* quando vidit eum ab omnibus creaturis graviter deploratum; *quintus* quando vidit eum a Iudeis incognitum et crucifixum; *sextus* quando vidit eum cum dolore et clamore valido vita corporali privatum; *septimus* quando vidit eum sub uno saxo in monumento firmiter observatum.³¹

The second tradition expands contemplation on the sorrows of Our Lady to her entire life and includes episodes from Jesus' childhood. Between 1380 and 1390 two series can be found:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Prophecy of Simeon | 1. Prophecy of Simeon |
| 2. Flight into Egypt | 2. Flight into Egypt |
| 3. Loss in the Temple | 3. Loss in the Temple |
| 4. John informs Our Lady of Judas' betrayal | 4. Jesus insulted |
| 5. The Crucifixion | 5. The Crucifixion |
| 6. The Burial | 6. Dead Jesus on his mother's knees |
| 7. Our Lady visits the places of her Son's passion. ³³ | 7. The Burial ³² |

The present series of stations can be identified with some certainty around 1491 in an inscription by an anonymous poet that was commissioned by John de Coudenberg, Dean of the Canons of St. Giles in Abbenbrouck, Utrecht. He was devoted to Our Lady of Sorrows:

Disce, saluator, nostros meminisse dolores
Septenos, prosint ut tibi quaque die.
Predixit Simeon animam mucrone feriri
Et Matrem Nati vulnera ferre sui.
Hinc, cum cesa fuit puerorum turba piorum,
Pertuli in Egyptum non bene tuta meum.
Et dolui querens puerum divina docentem
In templo. Hinc captum pondera ferre crucis
Cum vidi: et ligno fixum; Tum morte sopitum
Deponi; Inque petra linquere pulsa fui.

³¹ Mauro DONNINI. *Un codice trecentesco di fra Niccolò d'Arezzo, O.S.M. nella Biblioteca Comunale di Perugia*, (attribuzione e primi sondaggi testuali) in *Studi Storici OSM* 40 (1990) p. 40.

³² Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. Lat. 520, f. 58v. Cf. É. MALE. *L'Art religieux de la fin du Moyen Âge en France*, 5e ed. Paris, A. Colin, 1949, p. 124.

³³ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. Lat. 520, f. 58v. Cf. É. MALE. *L'Art religieux de la fin du Moyen Âge en France*, 5e ed. Paris, A. Colin, 1949, pp. 123-124.

Hos igitur nostros quisquis meditare dolores,
Percipies Natum ferre salutis opem.³⁴

The Servite Order accepted this series even though there was still some uncertainty in the seventeenth century about the first sorrow. Some held that it was the circumcision of her Son (cf. *Lk* 2, 21) and other claimed it was Simeon's prophecy (cf. *Lk* 2, 34). The Diet celebrated in Reggio Emilia in 1660 issued a decree stating that the circumcision of her Son was Mary's first sorrow. In spite of this decree the traditional series with Simeon's prophecy as the first sorrow gradually prevailed.³⁵

34. The resulting stations are the following:

1. Mary receives Simeon's prophecy with faith (*Lk* 2, 34-35)
2. Mary flees into Egypt with Jesus and Joseph (*Mt* 2, 13-14)
3. Mary seeks the lost Jesus in Jerusalem (*Lk* 2, 43-45)
4. Mary meets Jesus on the road to Calvary (*Lk* 23, 26-27)
5. Mary stands at the foot of the Cross (*Jn* 19, 25-27)
6. Mary accepts the body of Jesus from the cross on to her lap (*Mt* 27, 57-59)
7. Mary places the body of Jesus in the tomb and awaits the resurrection (*Jn* 19, 40-42)

Five Schemes (Patterns)

35. Five patterns or schemes can be discerned in the *Via Matris*, they are:

- I. Mother and Disciple, on the Way of the Cross.
- II. With Mary, a journey of faith and suffering.
- III. The "*Via Matris*" Our Lady's journey of love.
- IV. The "*Via Matris*" a journey of life and service.
- V. Mary's journey of suffering and discipleship.

The sorrowful journey of the Lord's Mother consists of the same events and structural elements but it can be looked at from different perspectives that highlight specific aspects of Mary's suffering and give rise to different ritual expression.

Structural Elements of the "Via Matris"

36. Essentially each scheme involves three parts: the introduction, seven "stations" and a conclusion. Each of these parts consists of various elements. For a better understanding and appreciation we will discuss the nature and function of these three parts.

Introduction

37. The Sign of the Cross

Like many liturgical celebrations and devotions the *Via Matris* opens "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." This gesture is distinctive to all the Lord's disciples and its significance is obvious: those praying constitute a holy assembly that professes its faith in the One

³⁴ Text found in P.M. SOULIER. *La confrérie de Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs dans les Flandres*. Bruxelles, Pères Servites de Marie, 1913, p. 10; Cf. also A.M. LÉPICIER. *Mater Dolorosa*. Notes d'histoire, de liturgie et d'iconographie sur le culte de Notre-Dame des Douleurs. Spa, Aux Éditions Servites, 1948, p. 238; E. BERTAUD. *Douleurs (Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs)*, in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, Ascétique e Mystique*, III (1957), 1692-1693.

³⁵ For this event see *Corona dell'Addolorata*. Celebrazione della "Compassio Virginis". Romae, Curia Generalis OSM, 1986, pp. 23-25.

and Triune God of Revelation – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – and proclaims the saving event of redemption (the sign of the cross).

After the sign of the cross there is a ‘greeting’ or formula glorifying God for having associated the Virgin Mary to the work of salvation and generally an admonition. It is a brief summary of the contents of the *Via Matris* and an exhortation “to follow in Our Lady’s footsteps on her sorrowful journey in union with her Son” (Scheme IV).

38. Prayer

The introduction concludes with a prayer (in Scheme III it is a hymn). The prayer asks God to look down upon the faithful who are about to celebrate the *Via Matris* devotion.

Central Part

39. The central part of the *Via Matris* involves a journey – the journey of Mary’s life – with seven stops (stations) – seven sorrowful events that marked the life of the Lord’s Mother.

Even if the place in which the devotion is practiced is restricted and movement is minimal it must still be present. The movement reflects the passing of life; the ‘station’ or stopping at intervals allows us to contemplate a sorrowful episode and to fathom its meaning – then we must rise up and continue our journey.

40. Each ‘station’ involves the following elements: declaration of the sorrowful event, introductory verse, reading a Gospel passage, prayer and processional hymn.

41. Declaration of the sorrow

The one presiding or a reader will announce the sorrow to be contemplated at this “station.” When circumstances allow it is advisable to assign this task to a single, appointed reader.

42. Introductory verse

The introductory verse uses the following words:

V. We praise you, holy Mary.

R. Faithful Mother at the foot of your Son’s Cross.

It is an act of praise; it glorifies the Blessed Virgin for her faithfulness in the supreme hour of suffering: the death of her Son. The verse – by its nature – should be sung.

43. Gospel passage

At this point a Gospel passage about the sorrow being contemplated in the station is read. We would suggest a brief passage but there is no reason a longer passage should not be read – or even substituted with something else – if the make-up of the assembly permits it.

The reading is always followed by a moment of silence. This allows participants to absorb what has been read.

In Scheme III after the Gospel passage and the moment of silence a “Word of the Church” is read; the text we propose can be replaced by something else appropriate; in Scheme V there is a meditation that involves both readers and the assembly.

44. Prayer

After the moment of silence there is a prayer directed to God or Our Lady. It asks for the grace suggested by the sorrow being considered. This prayer can take on various forms: a short litany concluding with a collect (Schemes I, II and V); a responsorial psalm (Scheme III) or a prayer addressed directly to Mary (Scheme IV).

45. Processional hymn

The purpose of this hymn is to accompany the passage from one “station” to another. We would suggest various types of processional hymns: the *Stabat Mater*, the well-known lament “which though full of desolation involves spiritual severity and the uninterrupted tradition of Christian iconography.”³⁶ It is frequently attributed to Iacopone da Todi (+1306) but there is no real evidence for this.

Scheme IV uses litany triplets; litanies – of the Saints, or the Blessed Virgin – have been traditionally used for processional singing.

Every effort must be made to see that these processional songs are well sung – even in small groups.

Dismissal

46. The dismissal or conclusion in schemes I, II, III and V includes an admonition, an acclamation, a prayer, a blessing and a dismissal:

- the *admonition* is meant to direct the thoughts of those taking part to the Resurrection of Christ:

At the end of the “Via Matris”
We salute the Virgin
Of faith, of expectation, or hope
And we turn our eyes
To the light of Easter.

- the *acclamation* – *Blessed art thou* or *Rejoice Daughter of Zion* – expresses the community’s praise of our Lady for the grace bestowed by her cooperation with the saving mission of Christ;

- the *prayer*, voiced by the president is a plea that God grant his abundant gifts to those taking part in this devotion, and that he associate them with the glory of the Risen Christ; in Scheme V the prayer is addressed to Our Lady;

- the *blessing* – when the presider is a priest or deacon – has the structure and contents of this ritual sequence;

- the *dismissal formula*

May Our Lady protect us
And graciously guide us on life’s journey.

We find once more the metaphor of life as a journey.

47. In Scheme IV the conclusion or dismissal is a lengthy intercessory prayer addressed to Our Lady. It is a litany with the response *Remember*. It refers to all the various members of the Church and the human family and all their needs.

IV. THE PASTORAL VALUE AND USE OF THE “VIA MATRIS”

³⁶ A. MOMIGLIANO. *Storia della letteratura italiana dalle origini ai nostri giorni*, 8a edizione, Milan, Principato 1977, p. 13.

48. The *Via Matris* is a devotional exercise. It is at the border of the liturgy – a border that is not easy to discern. If celebrated properly it derives its spiritual value and pastoral efficacy from the following:

- through contemplation of the “compassion” of Our Lady it draws the faithful to one of the essential aspects of the Paschal Mystery: the saving passion of Christ;
- it sheds light on the mystery of suffering – something no one escapes. It does this with the light emanating from the singular example of how Mary of Nazareth, full of faith, endured this experience;
- it makes those who practice this devotion share in the sufferings of our brothers and sisters. Celebrating Mary’s sorrows is not limited to meditation, thanksgiving and praise; it involves paying attention to men and women who suffer;
- it arouses feelings of mercy. Apart from contemplation of the merciful goodness of the Savior there is nothing that moves the soul to mercy as effectively as contemplation of the loving compassion of Our Lady; at the foot of the Cross Mary is “the Virgin of forgiveness.”

The “Via Matris” and Servites today

49. The present Constitutions of the Order of Friar Servants of Mary and the post-conciliar Constitutions of the female congregations and institutes aggregated to the Order make no mention of the *Via Matris*. There is an implicit reference in article 7 of the Servite Constitutions. Communities are urged to “express their Marian piety by drawing on practices proper to our living tradition;”³⁷ the *Via Matris* is a part of the Order’s living tradition.

The best days for this celebration

50. Because of their nature or our tradition we would suggest the following days as appropriate for the public celebration of the *Via Matris* in Servite churches:

- weekdays in Lent – especially Fridays;
- Fridays in the month of September;
- the seven Fridays preceding the Solemnity of Our Lady of Sorrows (September 15) unless some other liturgical celebration occurs on those days (e.g. September 8, Nativity of the Blessed Virgin; September 14, Exaltation of the Holy Cross).

Blessing the “Via Matris”

51. When the *Via Matris* is erected in a church, chapel or public place, it would be advisable that it be inaugurated using the rite described in the Appendix (pp. ???).

- L.* Leader
- R.* Reader
- R1.* First Reader
- R2.* Second Reader
- A.* All

³⁷ *Const. OSM*, 7.