

Simeon was right.
He warned Mary that God's plans for her were not going to be easy: she must be prepared to suffer.

Why, and how?

Firstly, you may recall that Simeon said that the "**secret thoughts**" (Greek: "*diologismoi kardion*") **of many will be laid bare**"

("diologismoi kardion" does not just mean *inmost* or *secret thoughts*, but *hostile devised schemes*).

These "**devised schemes**" would lead Jesus to His Cross – yes – but Simeon also knows that these hostile thoughts will *not* be "**laid bare**" unless Mary allowed herself to go through a tremendous suffering of her own.

Simeon is aware of this because he says: "**a sword will pierce your own soul too – so that the secret thoughts of many may be**

laid bare."¹

Simeon's words, "**so that**" clearly reveal that Christ's suffering is *conditional* upon Mary's ability embrace God the Father's plan of salvation.

Mothers love their children *unconditionally*;

yet, here we can see that Mary is called to love her Son with one condition, a condition that goes against the very maternal nature of motherhood.

She must be prepared to embrace God's plan of redemption in the sufferings of her Son.

This would come as a sharp pain of grief likened to a "**sword**" piercing her soul,

because as His mother, her maternal desire to keep Him safe must die just as Jesus must die.

¹ Lk 2:35.

According to Simeon's prophecy, this suffering of hers is to be extremely intense because for the word, "**sword**," Luke does not use the Greek word "*mazaira*" (which is a "*small sword*," "*large knife*," "*dirk*," or "*dagger*"), but the Greek word "*romphaia*," which is a "*broadsword*," or "*saber*" – a much larger sword – the same word used to describe the Cherubim's sword at the gate of Paradise² and Goliath's huge sword.³

Yet, there's more to this imagery of a sword than just its size.

The Old Testament helps us to understand the nature of this metaphor of a "**sword**" in another way too: Luke tells us that this sword will "**pierce**" Mary's soul. The Greek word he uses here ("*dierxesthai*") means to "**pass through.**"

This same word is used by the prophet Ezekiel, in telling the People

² Gen 3:24.

³ 1 Sam 17:45, 47, 51; 21:10; 22:10

of Israel of how they will be discriminated by the Lord's judgement:

"Let a sword *pass through* [*dierxesthai*] the land so that I may cut off man and beast."⁴

This image in Ezekiel of a sword *passing through* the land is of a sword which selects or discriminates; a sword of judgement, destroying some and sparing others. It's *not* a sword for punishment, but for *discrimination*.⁵

This imagery of the sword in the Old Testament could very well be a foreshadowing of what this sword Simeon spoke about will consist of because it is coherent with the first part of Simeon's Oracle where Jesus is said to be set for the fall and rise of many in Israel.

⁴ Ezek 14:17.

⁵ cf. Ezek 6:8-9; 12:14-16.

It's also consistent with what Jesus will say Himself:

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother ... a man's foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me;

and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;

and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it."⁶

What would happen if Mary tried to do what mothers are naturally

⁶ Mt 10:34-39.

inclined to do by trying to protect her Son from the Cross?

In addition to preventing these "**secret thoughts,**" these "**hostile devised schemes**" from being "**laid bare,**" (that is, from being accomplished), Mary would be going against her Son's condition of discipleship, that is, to love God more than one's family members.

Now, if this sword of discrimination is to divide families by setting "**a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother,**" then why would this sword of discrimination not include Jesus' own family?

Interestingly, in the very next scene in Luke's Gospel, Mary begins to learn what this sword of discrimination will indeed consist of.

She begins to learn that this sword discriminates against her human attachment to her Son;

that Jesus' relationship with His Heavenly Father even outranks His relationship with His own mother! Remember how, when Mary and Joseph find Jesus back in the Temple, Mary said to Him: "**My child, why have you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you?**" Jesus replied, "**Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be where my Father is?**"⁷

Here you can see that Mary is indeed discovering what this "**sword**" Simeon spoke about consists of, and Who it is who holds the hilt!

It's interesting, too, that from this point onwards, never again in the Scriptures do we hear of St Joseph. Since Mary is in the habit of "**pondering in her heart**"⁸ what

⁷ Lk 2:48-49.

⁸ Lk 2:19.

God is revealing to her in her life about her Son, this habit prepared her for the full brunt of this sword that will pass through her soul at the foot of the Cross.

She knew that she must let Him go.

But, whenever we let go of anything to put God in the centre of our life, while there may be the initial pain and sorrow, for those who possess the faith of Mary, it always leads to an indescribably joy.

Look at what happened to Mary... by letting go of her Son at the foot of the Cross, she became the Mother of us all! Mary was called to love Christ "**conditionally**" so that she could love you and I **unconditionally!**