

Our Lady of Sorrows

“Thirty days hath September” as the traditional poem goes, and at the exact middle of the month - September 15 - the Church celebrates the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, Nuestra Senora de los Dolores. Before Liturgical reform there were two such feasts: the dated feast, which in the 1800s was near the 15th, but varied in and around that date, and one celebrated each year on the Friday of Passion Week during Lent. The Seven Dolours of Mary are:

- The prophecy of Simeon, that a sword would pierce her heart;
 - The flight into Egypt;
 - The loss of the child Jesus in Jerusalem;
- The meeting of mother and son on the way to Calvary;
 - The Crucifixion;
- The taking down from the Cross;
 - Jesus laid in the Tomb.

There were litanies of the Seven Dolours, a scapular dedicated to the mystery, and various prayers addressed to the Holy Mother of Sorrows.



Dolor Beads which belonged to Sr. Dolores Armer

Upon the occasion of her reception into a religious community, a novice receives the name by which she will be known and a feast day associated with her saint. In the community annals of the new Society of the Holy Family, this entry appears:

“ On the 10th day of September, 1878, Sister Mary Teresa of Jesus was appointed by his Grace, Most Rev. Archbishop Alemany, Mistress of Novices and Superior for one year; and on the same day the following ladies entered in this novitiate: Miss Lizzie Armer, Miss Ellen Javet, Miss Catherine Kelly, Miss Mary McKeon and Miss Katie Block. ”

Therefore, we may assume that Lizzie became Sister Dolores Armer on that date, and celebrated her first official feast day five days later.

Sister Dolores had a deep devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows from her early years. Her poetry skills were not especially noteworthy in a literary sense, but the inspiration was sound, honest and deep. There is a long poem, quoted partially below, that she dates "Feast of the Seven Dolours, March 6, 1876" (the Passion Week observance) which gives the flavor of her meditations.

Come hither, all ye mourners,
ye broken-hearted come,
to the Mother of all Dolours
and pour out ev'ry moan.
Her prayer is ever rising
His grace comes down like rain,
that His passion and her sorrows
may not be spent in vain.
Oh, there is ne'er a sorrow
to her pitying heart is told
she has not felt before us,
when the sword pass'd thru her soul.
Then thru this life's sad exile
our griefs before her lay
until at last we meet her
where all tears are wiped away.

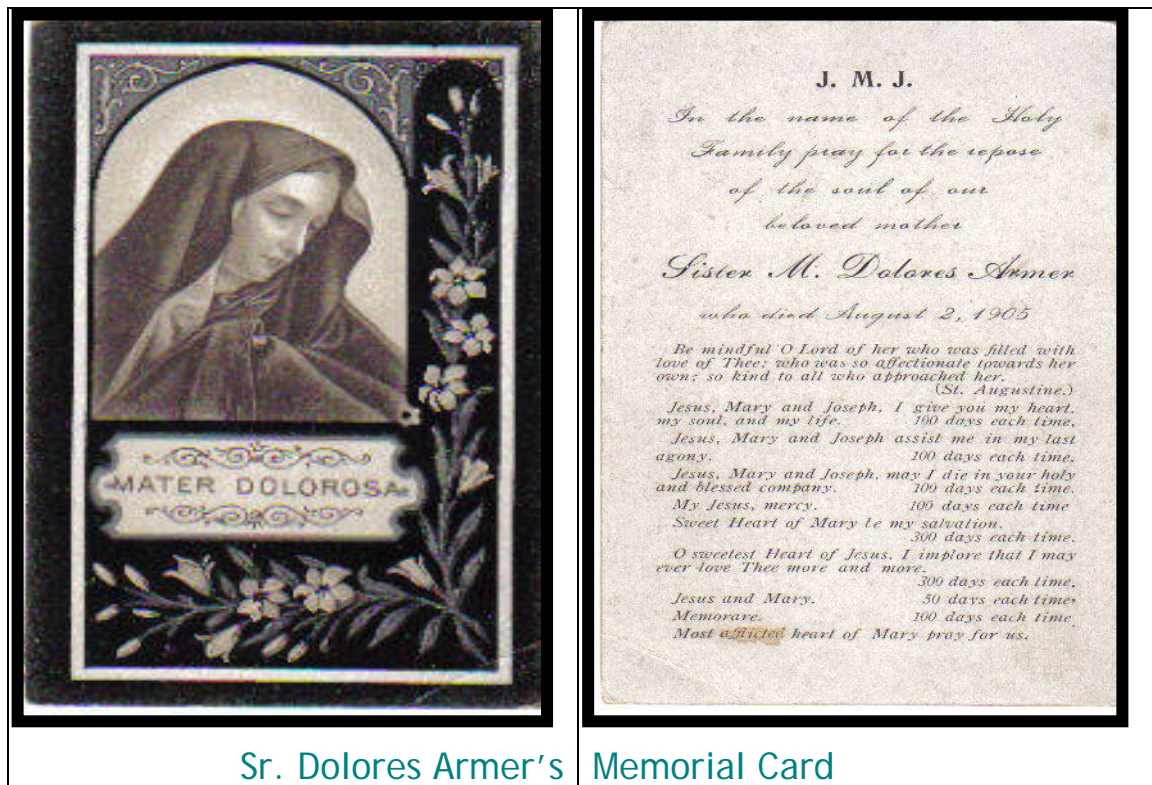
Although feast days were work days, Sister Dolores' friends and her adopted family, the Tobin's, observed it in ways that became traditional and perhaps reflect Sister Dolores' favorite treats. Very useful surprises also accompanied the day. On September 16, 1887 the annals entry reads: "*Mrs. Tobin made Sister a present of two hundred and fifty dollars. The usual donation of ice cream, candy and fruit was received.*"

The feasts passed happily through the following years, an occasion for rejoicing and sharing with community, friends and family, but in 1900 Sister Dolores had been very ill during the months that preceded her feast. She did not tell her sisters how serious her heart condition was and arranged all the accounts for the house, delivered helpful suggestions to Sister Teresa and then quietly slipped out to the hospital for surgery. During her July 31 operation, she experienced heart failure, but was revived by the excellent hospital staff. She was kept in the hospital until

September 1, when she came home to the infirmary. Increasing weakness and illness would plague her through the remaining four years of her life. By September 13 she was obliged to return for treatments and was then sent to the country for a rest, but returned for her feast day, of which the annals of September 16, 1900 give a joyous account.

“ Father Mulligan, S.J. offered the holy Sacrifice in the chapel. The Community sang the Stabat Mater after Mass. Sister Dolores was present and received Holy Communion. Beautiful flowers had been sent and Sister arranged Blessed Mother’s altar very prettily with seven single beautiful red roses, fairy lights and candles with a large bunch of red roses in the center. Sister came to the refectory for dinner and supper for the first time and there was great rejoicing. Our usual gift of ice cream, candy and cake came from our unknown friend once more [Archbishop W.P. Riordan].”

When the dated feast was kept in 1905, slightly more than a month after Sister’s death, the notation of September 16 reads: “Mrs. Pescia sent some beautiful flowers for the decoration of the altar and Sister [Teresa] ordered eight beautiful American Beauty roses for Blessed Mother’s shrine, seven for the Dolors and one for dear Sister.”



Sr. Dolores Armer's Memorial Card

Some years later Father Prendergast and his priestly advisors were talking over the placement of a new Day Home. There were several sites being considered upon which to construct a replacement for one of the sisters' facilities destroyed by the earthquake and fire of 1906. Reportedly, over a glass of brandy and a good cigar, Father observed that, for him the site seemed fore ordained. "Mission Dolores [San Francisco de Asis], Dolores Street, Sister Dolores - the corner of 16th and Dolores is the place." Holy Family Day Home still stands upon that corner doing the work for which Sister opened the doors of the first Day Home on Polk Street in 1878. Hopefully, the sorrows of families and those in need will be addressed and lessened through its ministry and the continued ministries of the Sisters of the Holy Family.



1911 Day Home



2007 Day Home