

Dolorosa

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

APRIL 2019



The *Pentateuch* is the name given to the first five books of the Old Testament. We know these five books as Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These names are taken from the Septuagint, a second or third century B.C. translation of the Pentateuch from Hebrew into Greek. This translation of the Old Testament is called the *Septuagint* because it was the work of seventy (*septuaginta* in Latin) Jewish scholars.

The Pentateuch contains the earliest history of the human race. It also forms the book of law which governed the Chosen People. In his *Practical Handbook for the Study of the Bible*, Dr. Michael Seisenberger tells us that both Jews and Christians have always regarded Moses as the inspired author of the Pentateuch (265). The Son of God Himself attests to this fact. Addressing the Jews, Our Divine Savior said: "If you did believe Moses, you would perhaps believe me also; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?" (Jn. 5:46-47). Our Lord, in speaking of Moses' writings, was referring to the Pentateuch, or the Torah, as the Jews call it. Thus, did He affirm Moses as the inspired author of the first five books of the Old Testament.

In the final twenty-six chapters of Genesis, the Holy Ghost through the pen of Moses details a number of events which are significant in the history of the Chosen

People. In short, this is what happened. Years after the death of Sara, Abraham's wife, Isaac grew up and married Rebecca. They had twin children, two sons, whom they named Esau and Jacob. Esau, being slightly older than Jacob, was entitled to what was called the birthright. Very simply, the birthright was something given to the oldest son of a family. This son was given a larger portion of his father's wealth, he became the patriarch of the family, and he also obtained a special blessing from his father before he died. Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for some stew, and then Jacob, through deceit, tricked his father Isaac into giving him his special blessing.

Soon after, Jacob, whose name God later changed to Israel, went to live with his uncle Laban. In time, he married and had thirteen children: twelve sons and one daughter. While he loved all of his children, Jacob had a special love for his son Joseph. We read in the thirty-sixth chapter of Genesis (3-4):

Now Israel loved Joseph above all his sons, because he had him in his old age: and he made him a coat of diverse colors. And his brethren seeing that he was loved by his father, more than all his sons, hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.



This hatred towards Joseph reached such a degree that some of his brothers plotted to kill him. However, Ruben, the oldest brother, convinced the others not to carry out their wicked plan. At length, Joseph was sold by some of his brothers as a slave to a caravan of Egyptian merchants for twenty pieces of silver. They then dipped his brightly colored coat into the blood of a young goat, brought it back to their father, and deceitfully told him that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast.

Meanwhile, Joseph was brought to Egypt. He was sold to a man named Putiphar, the chief captain of Pharaoh's army. Two years passed. Then, one night the Pharaoh had some strange dreams which he did not understand. He believed that there was some important meaning behind them. He therefore sent for all the wise men of Egypt and described his dreams to them, but no one could give him the meaning of these dreams. It was then that one of his servants informed him that Joseph could interpret dreams. Pharaoh at once summoned Joseph to his court and related the strange dreams to him. With the help of God, Joseph interpreted the dreams and explained their meaning to Pharaoh. Joseph told him that a famine was coming and that he must immediately begin preparing for it. Joseph's words pleased the Pharaoh so much that he made Joseph his right-hand man. "Thou shalt be over my house," Pharaoh said to him, "and at the commandment of thy mouth all the people shall obey: only in the kingly throne will I be above thee" (Gen. 41:40). Joseph thus became the governor of all of Egypt, and he ensured that provisions be set aside for the time of famine.

In time, the famine struck. It spread far and wide, and soon Joseph's father Jacob and his siblings began to suffer from it. Hearing that there was much grain left in Egypt, Jacob sent ten of his sons to beg some from the Egyptians. They were sent to Joseph, whom they did not recognize as their brother. After playing a few tricks on his siblings, Joseph revealed his identity

to them. The brothers confessed their sin in selling him and sought his forgiveness. Joseph forgave them and then went the extra mile to render good for their evil. He did this by inviting his family to Egypt where they could live comfortably. And so it was that Jacob and his descendants—the Israelites—left the land of Chanaan and came to live in Egypt. Joseph lived to the age of 110, and Moses concludes the Book of Genesis with his burial.

After the death of Joseph, the Israelites continued to live in peace and prosperity. However, this all changed when Ramses II, the new Pharaoh, ascended the throne of Egypt. "There arose a new king over Egypt," writes Moses in the opening chapter of Exodus, "that knew not Joseph" (1:8). Seeing how numerous and strong the Israelite nation had become and fearing the descendants of Jacob might attempt to overthrow Egyptian rule, the Pharaoh declared: "Come, let us wisely oppress them, lest they multiply: and if any war shall rise against us, join with our enemies, and having overcome us, depart out of the land" (1:9).

The Egyptians, therefore, enslaved the Israelites and employed them in building temples, canals, and cities. In his *Bible History* Father George Johnson explains that God permitted these sufferings to afflict the Chosen People because "in their day of freedom and happiness, many of them had fallen into idolatry and the vices of the Egyptians" (84). In spite of all their trials and sufferings, the Israelites continued to increase in number. It reached the point that Pharaoh feared they might rise up in revolt. And so, he issued another command, which we may say was a forerunner to that given by King Herod at the time of Christ. Pharaoh ordered that every Israelite boy should be killed as soon as he was born. In spite of this command, many little boys were saved. In some cases, the order was not enforced; in others, the Hebrew mothers were able to hide their baby boys. This was the case with Moses.

— Michael Malm. *Joseph And His Brothers.*



Most of us, if not all of us, are familiar in one way or another with the story of Moses: that he was raised in the court of the Pharaoh, conversed with Almighty God in the burning bush, wrought miracles by God's power to move the Pharaoh to free the Israelites, and led the Israelites out of Egypt and through the Red Sea. We may not, however, be as familiar with Moses' sister Mary or Miriam, as she is often called. While it is true that she is relatively unknown, Mary nonetheless played an important role in the history of the Chosen People. She not only helped her mother save Moses' life, but she was also instrumental in setting in motion the deliverance of the Israelites.

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Mary was the oldest of three children born to Amram and Jochebed of the tribe of Levi. She is mentioned in the Books of Exodus and Numbers. The first time we hear of her is shortly after the birth of Moses. To protect him from the Pharaoh's edict that all male Israelite children should be put to death at the moment of birth, Jochebed carefully hid her newborn son in her home for three months.

After that she began to fear that he would be discovered, so she made a wicker basket and covered it with tar. She then placed the baby in the basket and set it in bulrushes on the riverbank. Mary stood by watching over her little brother. Soon after, the Pharaoh's daughter and some of her maids walked down to the river. While there, she noticed the basket in the hedges and asked one of her maids to retrieve it. "She opened it," we read in Exodus, "and seeing within it an infant crying, having compassion on it she said: This is one of the babes of the Hebrews" (2:6).

From a distance Mary observed all that transpired. Perceiving that her baby brother was in danger, she hurriedly approached the Pharaoh's daughter and asked,



"Shall I go and call to thee a Hebrew woman, to nurse the babe?" (Exod. 2:7). The Pharaoh's daughter agreed, and moments later, Mary returned with her mother. The Egyptian princess, not knowing who she was, placed Moses in his own mother's care and promised to pay her for taking care of the child.

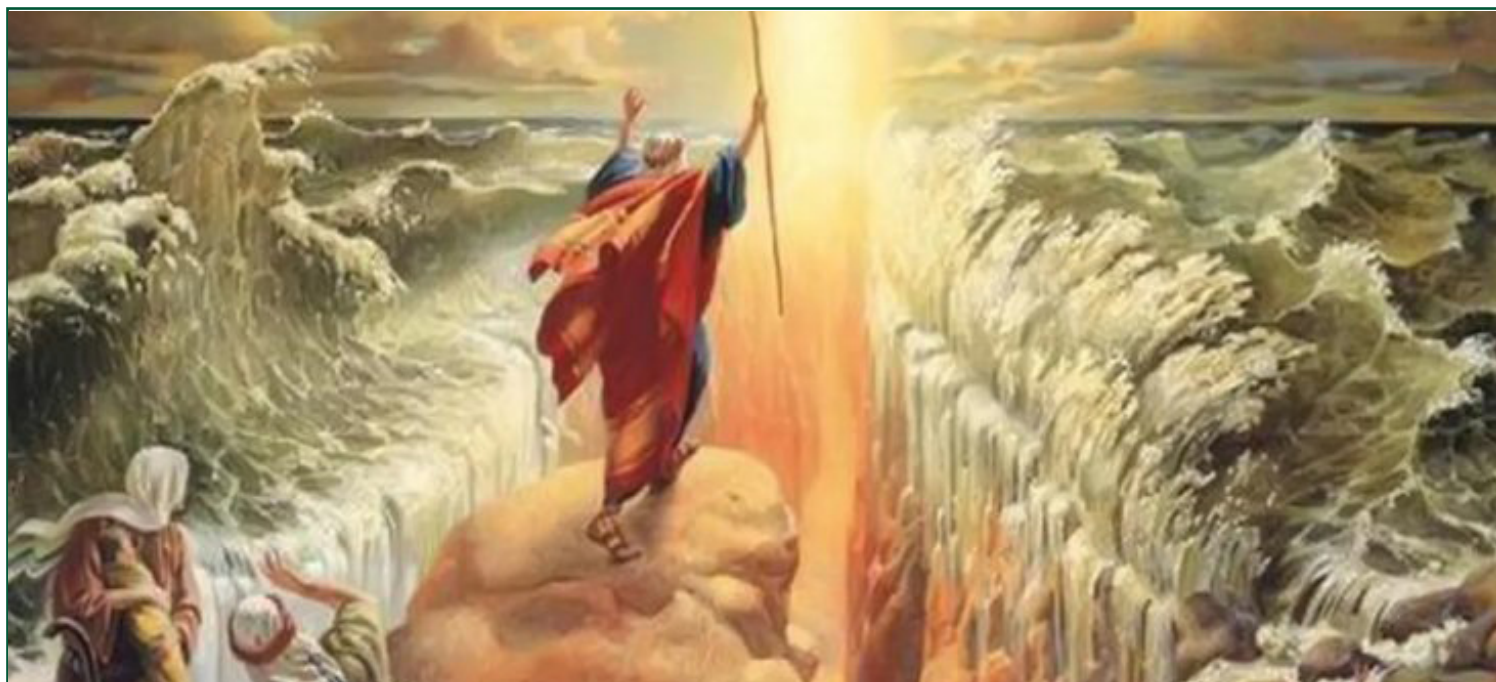
That is the last we hear of Mary for many years. Moses does not mention her again until the fifteenth chapter of Exodus. But, we may well imagine that she helped both of her brothers, Moses and Aaron, in what ways she could. While they continually urged Pharaoh in the name of Almighty God to free the Israelites from bondage, Mary was certainly working in the background, assisting them with her prayers and perhaps even by preparing meals. It would seem that she never married because if she had a husband, he would have been named at least once after her, as the Sacred Scriptures are wont to do.

The next time we meet Mary in Sacred Scripture is after the Israelites had passed through the Red Sea. To celebrate this miraculous passage through the sea and the subsequent destruction of the Egyptian army, Mary took up a tambourine and led a number of the other women in a song of victory. "Mary, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron," we read in Exodus, "took a timbrel in her hand: and all the women went forth after her with timbrels and with dances" (15:20). She then began to sing: "Let us sing to the Lord, for he is gloriously magnified, the horse and his rider he hath thrown into the sea" (15:21).

Unfortunately, the ecstatic joy Mary expressed on this occasion was soon to fade. Writing of this impending change in *The Women of the Bible*, Michael Cardinal Faulhaber says, "Side by side with the bright traits of the portrait of Miriam there appears a deep, deep shadow.



— Raphael Santi. *The Finding of Moses*. 1519.



The prophetess of the Divine Spirit fell in later life a victim to the evil spirit of jealousy” (49).

In the twelfth chapter of the Book of Numbers, Moses relates what happened as the Israelites wandered about searching for the Promised Land. The chapter opens with these words: “And Mary and Aaron spoke against Moses, because of his wife the Ethiopian. And they said: Hath the Lord spoken by Moses only? hath he not also spoken to us in like manner?” (1-2) In other words, Mary, along with Aaron, began speaking poorly of Moses; she started gossiping about him. The very same sister who so many years before had watched out for her brother’s life gave way to her passion of anger and revolted against him.

It would seem, as Cardinal Faulhaber points out, that Moses’ wife, Sephora, lauded the greatness of her husband in the presence of Mary and Aaron and this sparked the spirit of jealousy, which, in turn, ignited the fire of anger (50). This jealousy prompted the remark: “Hath the Lord spoken to Moses only?” It is as though Mary were saying, “What about me? Has God not spoken to me, too? Why then do you praise Moses only?” She, therefore, stooped to speaking against Moses, to speaking poorly of him, in order to lessen the people’s estimation of him and to raise herself up.

While Mary may have fooled some to a certain degree, she did not deceive God. He knew exactly what she was doing, and He made her answer for her outburst. Almighty God summoned Moses, Aaron, and Mary to the tabernacle of the covenant. He then descended in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tabernacle. Calling Aaron and Mary aside, God said to them:

Hear my words: if there be among you a prophet of the Lord, I will appear to him in a vision, or I will speak to him in a dream. But it is not so with my

servant Moses who is most faithful in all my house: For I speak to him mouth to mouth: and plainly, and not by riddles and figures doth he see the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak ill of my servant Moses? And being angry with them he went away: The cloud also that was over the tabernacle departed: and behold Mary appeared white as snow with a leprosy. (Num. 12:6-10)

Leprosy was thus the punishment meted out by Almighty God for Mary’s jealousy and anger. No sooner had God departed from her presence, than her flesh turned “white as snow” and began to corrupt. We may wonder why Aaron, also, did not succumb to leprosy, for he, too, had spoken against Moses. Cardinal Faulhaber, among other Scripture scholars, tells us that Mary alone was struck with the disease because she was the instigator behind the rebellion. This is why her name is mentioned first in Numbers 12:1: “Mary and Aaron spoke against Moses” (50).

Seeing his sister sick unto death, Aaron besought Moses to beg God to heal her. “I beseech thee,” Aaron said to Moses, “lay not upon us this sin, which we have foolishly committed” (Num. 12:11). Moses acceded to Aaron’s wishes and returned good for the evil that had been done to him. He besought God to heal Mary, and God agreed to do so on one condition: that she spend seven days outside of the camp. “Mary therefore was put out of the camp seven days,” we read in Numbers, “and the people moved not from that place until Mary was called again” (12:15).

Mary spent the rest of her life assisting Moses and the Chosen People as they searched for the Promised Land. However, she, like her brothers, was not destined to see it. Having reached the desert called Sin, she died

and was buried there with the utmost reverence. “May the good Angels,” as Cardinal Faulhaber writes, “who defended the body of her brother Moses against the devil (Jude 9) keep guard over her forgotten desert grave” (51).

“And Mary and Aaron spoke against Moses, because of his wife the Ethiopian. And they said: Hath the Lord spoken by Moses only? hath he not also spoken to us in like manner?” (Num. 12:1-2)

As we glance over the life of Mary, the sister of Moses, and see all the wonderful events she was part of and how truly great she was, it is hard to get away from that one dark moment in her life. It is sort of like looking over a student’s grades and seeing one *F* mixed in with all *A*’s; the eye would naturally gravitate towards the *F*. That poor grade would stick out like a sore thumb, as the saying goes.

There is no question about it: Mary could have been renowned as a prophetess and as one who helped lead the Israelites out of captivity. However, because she could not hold her tongue, she is now perhaps best known for yielding to her jealousy and allowing the passion of anger to dictate what she said and how she acted.

Among the eleven passions that we all have is anger, and it is by far the strongest. It is true that as a passion, anger is in itself neither good nor bad, but can merely lead to good or bad. However, I would venture to say that, because of our fallen human nature, 95% of the time it leads to bad. In fact, Saint Francis de Sales tells us that even when we think we have a reason to be justly angry, we really do not because anger makes us unreasonable. Consequently, we do not judge things in the light of reason.

In his outstanding work *My Catholic Faith*, the Most Rev. Louis R. Morrow, S.T.D., defines anger as “a strong feeling of displeasure, combined with a desire to punish the offender” (52). Saint Thomas Aquinas defines it as the “inordinate desire for revenge on account of an offense real or imagined.” In other words, anger consists in striking back at someone or something—someone who offended us or something that did not work out the way we had planned. Anger can be expressed in thoughts, words, and actions. And, despite what certain people might say, it always makes the situation worse because it blinds our reason and enslaves our will.

Is this not what happened to Moses’ sister, Mary? Was she not blinded by her anger? She became so angry on account of her jealousy of Moses that she stooped to attempting to turn the Israelites against him by speaking



against him. That is how blinded she was.

Pope Saint Gregory the Great once wrote of the evils of anger. This is what he said, as related by Father Ferreol Girardey in *Conference Matter For Religious*:

Anger makes the heart beat and the body tremble; it is apt either to tie up the tongue altogether or to loosen it beyond measure. It reddens the face, gives a wild and fierce expression to the eyes, disfigures the countenance, and makes a person appear as if bereft of his senses, and, like drunkenness, it sometimes makes him unconscious of what he is saying or doing. (293)

These words from the pen of Saint Gregory might seem strong, but they nonetheless vividly describe the evil effects of anger when given free rein and not kept in check.

Today, we see anger’s wicked consequences throughout our country and throughout the world. How many shootings and murders take place as a result of anger? How much calumny and slander are spread, how many good names are ruined, because of this vice? How many friendships and even families are destroyed because people allow this passion to take over and dictate their course of action? Far too many.

It is a fact that anger was not only the cause of the first murder on record, but it was also the cause of the first breaking up of a family. Cain, as you may recall from the Book of Genesis, murdered his brother Abel out of

anger that was produced by his jealousy concerning Abel's sacrifice to Almighty God. Cain let his anger rule him, and it drove him to murder his brother.

Fallen human nature does not change. The same unruly passions that Cain had are found in mankind today. And, what's so sad about our day and age is that anger and vengeance are glorified by society. In countless movies and television shows, the hero is portrayed as a defender of "justice" by means of violence and, even at times, murder. Anger is often encouraged in the rage-filled lyrics of numerous modern songs played on radio stations across the country. The media is filled with reporters, politicians, and other famous persons angrily getting back at each other, trying to ruin one another's name. It is therefore undeniable that anger is fostered and even encouraged today, and it is unquestionably the cause of countless evils in our world. Some of these evils are greater, such as murder; others are lesser, such as quarreling and uncharitable speech. The lesser, however, are more frequent and can easily destroy our peace of soul and the peace of our families.

Let us take these considerations to heart and see what great price is paid by giving in to anger. Some are affected by anger to a greater extent than others, but we all have this passion, and we all must learn to restrain it. Let us begin this endeavor, or renew our purpose, by making a firm resolution to conquer this unruly passion. To help, let us follow the practical steps given by Saint Francis de Sales—one of the great saints and doctors of the Church who, at one time, struggled with anger.

Prayer

When we feel our anger rising in any situation, we must first, as Saint Francis de Sales tells us, turn to Our Divine Savior and Our Blessed Mother and ask them to help us. We can do this very simply by mentally praying little invocations, such as "Jesus, meek and humble of Heart, make my heart like unto Thine."

Check the First Impulse

After we have prayed, Saint Francis explains that we must then check the first impulse of anger. In other words, we must make efforts to subdue it immediately. Remember that feeling anger is not a sin. It becomes sinful when we express it in thought, word, or deed: for example, a cold silence or a look of disgust are manifestations of anger. We must thus act against this feeling immediately. It can be helpful to take a slow, deep breath, hold it for 3-5 seconds, and then slowly exhale. Controlled breathing has been proven to help calm the nerves and can be a very powerful means of controlling the passions, whether it be the passion of anger, fear, or whatever troubles us.

Refrain from Speaking & Acting

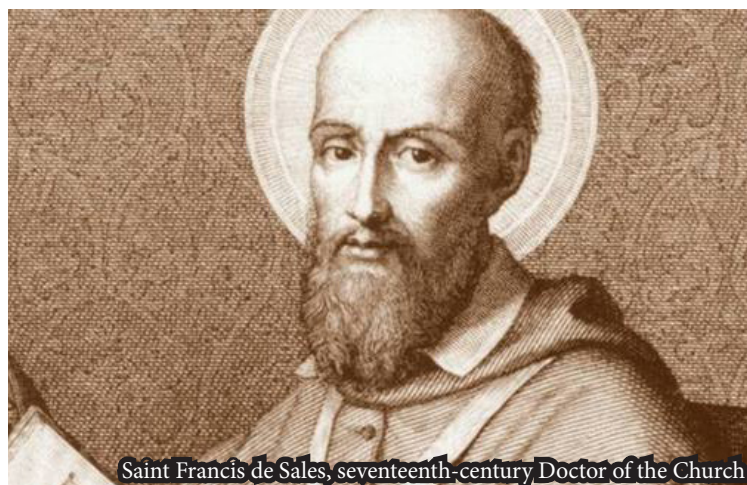
Saint Francis de Sales also advises us to be slow to speak and slow to act when anger is on the rise. In other words, we must never speak or act when under the influence of this passion. Anger, as I mentioned before, blinds our reason and more often than not it will cause us to say and do things that offend charity and thereby offend Almighty God. So, when possible, defer acting and speaking until calm.

Anticipate Occasions

Finally, Saint Francis de Sales explains that we ought to anticipate those occasions when we will be tempted. What he means is that we must prepare ourselves for the onset of anger. We do this by looking ahead in our day to see what could possibly upset us and then by making a plan on how to fight it, that is, by preparing our reaction.

Let us take these considerations to heart and see what great price is paid by giving in to anger. Some are affected by anger to a greater extent than others, but we all have this passion, and we all must learn to restrain it.

It will, at times, be difficult to control our anger. We may struggle and even fail, but we must persevere and keep working to achieve self-control. The Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary will give us the grace if we earnestly ask them for it and if we keep on fighting. "I can do all things," wrote Saint Paul, "in Him who strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). Saint Paul truly believed this, and thus it was with God's grace and his persevering efforts that he overcame his passions and was found worthy to be called an apostle. May we go forth to the struggle with these same words ever on our lips so that we, too, may be found worthy to be disciples of Christ.



Saint Francis de Sales, seventeenth-century Doctor of the Church