



Dolorosa

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUNE 2019



A STEP BACK IN TIME

A LEADER AMONG THE FAITHFUL

Father Paul Krug, C.S.P.V

After the death of Moses, his right-hand man Josue assumed leadership over the Israelites. It was under his direction that they eventually crossed the Jordan River and entered the Promised Land. The Israelites, however, were given anything but a warm welcome. On arriving in the land of Chanaan, they encountered numerous pagan armies that sought to destroy them. The Israelites therefore had to fight for their existence in the Promised Land. Through the intervention of Almighty God and under the prudent and brave command of Josue, the Israelite army successfully defeated their enemies.

In his *Bible History* Father George Johnson tells us that “when the Israelites took possession of their new country, they adopted a very simple manner of life. They did not have one king or ruler over all the people. Each tribe or family was independent and had its own head” (154). At this time, the Israelites enjoyed a life of ease and prosperity. Eventually, many of them forgot God. Some married their pagan neighbors, and in time many of these became idolaters.

Because of their infidelity, God was forced to punish the Chosen People from time to time. He did this

by permitting their enemies to make war upon them. The leaders of Israel during these wars were men who trained themselves in the art of war and who disciplined themselves. When the Chosen People were threatened, these leaders aroused the people and led them into battle. Father Johnson explains that

when several [Israelite] tribes had a common enemy, they often chose, under the direction of God, one man to lead their armies. This leader was usually the man who showed the greatest strength and courage, and who could make the other leaders obey him. Such a military leader was called a Judge. (154)

“The Israelites were ruled by Judges during several centuries. The Bible gives the names of fifteen Judges, the most famous of whom were Debbora, Gedeon, Samson, and Samuel.”

Typically, Judges had power to rule only in times of trouble. When the trouble had passed, their power was removed and given back to the heads of the tribes. “The Israelites,” writes Father Johnson, “were ruled by Judges during several centuries. The Bible gives the names of fifteen Judges, the most famous of whom were Debbora, Gedeon, Samson, and Samuel” (155).

The only female Judge mentioned in Sacred Scripture is the prophetess named Debbora. She is first

spoken of in the fourth chapter of the Book of Judges. The chapter opens with these words: “And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord” (4:1). As a punishment for their depravity, Almighty God allowed them to fall into the power of the Chanaanite king Jabin and the general of his army Sisara. For twenty years the Israelites suffered under the pagan king Jabin. It was then that they remembered God and earnestly besought Him to deliver them from their enemies.

Nothing is known of the life of Debbora before the events recorded in the Book of Judges. All we know of her personal life is that she was a prophetess and the wife of Lapidoth, and that the people of Israel came to her for judgment (Judges 4:4). No mention is made of who Debbora’s parents were, what kind of work Lapidoth did, or whether they had any children.

The first time we meet Debbora she is sitting under a palm tree. In *The Women of the Bible*, Michael Cardinal Faulhaber writes:

Under a palm tree, which formed a landmark for the districts far and wide, and was called in the local tongue “Debbora’s Palm,” Debbora held her court of judgment, and from far and near men journeyed to her, as to a Divine oracle, to receive unbloody decisions in cases of strife and answers to weighty questions. (77)

During her dealings with the Israelites, Debbora saw in the people an unwillingness to throw off the yoke of



the pagan Chanaanites. Even though the Jewish people had repented of their idolatry and immorality, they were content to remain in slavery; they were, so to speak, stuck in the mud.

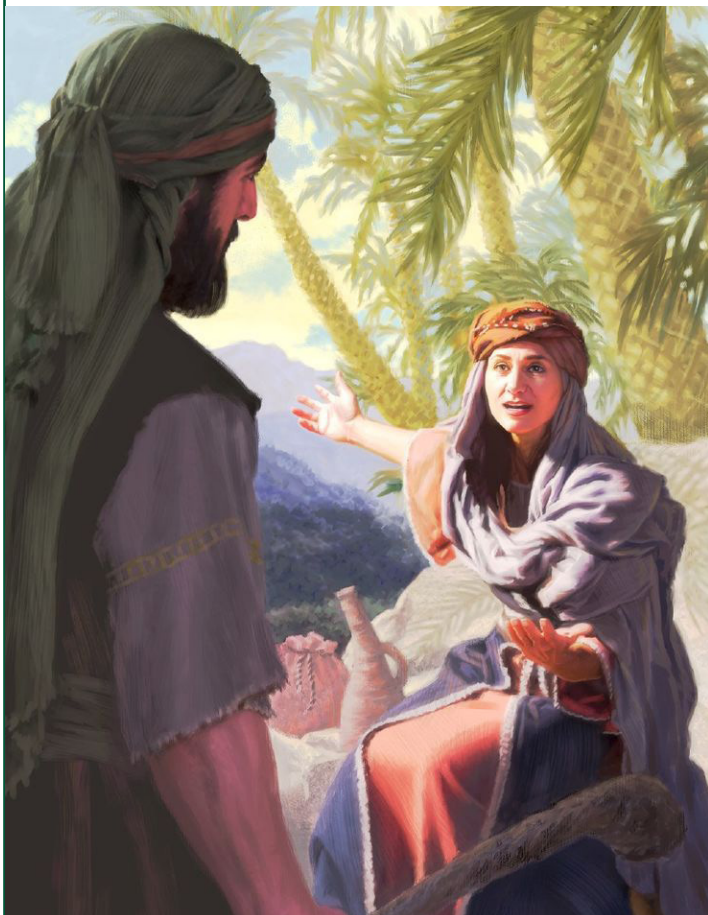
Seeing this sad state of affairs, Debbora, under divine inspiration, knew that she had to do something to stir up her people. Writing of the situation, Cardinal Faulhaber says:

While the men in the days of Debbora had all lost their heads and bent their necks in dull resignation to the yoke of the Chanaanites, she—the woman—felt herself strong enough in . . . her Divine mission to kindle the flame of battle for freedom and to call the men of her nation to arm in a holy war against the Chanaanitish tyrants. (77)

Debbora, therefore, sent for a man named Barac. Upon his arrival, Debbora informed him that God had a special mission for him. She said:

The Lord God of Israel hath commanded thee: Go, and lead an army to Mount Tabor, and thou shalt take with thee ten thousand fighting men . . . And I will bring unto thee in the place of the torrent Cison, Sisara the general of Jabin’s army, and his chariots, and all his multitude, and will deliver them into thy hand. (Judges 4:6)

At first, Barac was reluctant to fight. Perhaps he was content to live under the tyranny of the enemy of Israel. Perhaps he knew that his forces were fewer in number, not well trained, and armed with inferior weapons. Against such odds, it was unlikely that he could succeed, and he did not wish to enter a battle he could not win. Whatever his reason, Barac did not want to lead an army into battle. And so, as even we are wont to do when called upon to undertake something that we, naturally speaking, want no part of, Barac came up with all sorts of “ifs” and “buts.” “If thou wilt come with me,” he said to Debbora, “I will go: if thou wilt not come with me, I will not go” (Judges 4:8).





In *The Women of the Bible*, Cardinal Faulhaber explains that Barac was, in a certain sense, punished for his timidity, want of faith, and unwillingness to go into battle without Debbora (78). For, after hearing Barac's response, Debbora informed him that she would indeed lead the army into battle, but she also told him that because of his lack of faith, Israel's victory would not be attributed to him. "I will go indeed with thee," she said to him, "but at this time the victory shall not be attributed to thee, because Sisara shall be delivered into the hand of a woman" (Judges 4:9).

Having uttered these prophetic words, Debbora rose to her feet and went with Barac to a place called Cedes. There, an army of ten thousand Israelites assembled and prepared to make war on the Chanaanites. "The army of Israel," writes Cardinal Faulhaber, "[took] up its position on the southern slope of Mount Thabor . . ." (79).

"And it was told Sisara," we read in the Book of Judges, "that Barac the son of Ablinoem was gone up to mount Thabor" (4:12). The Chanaanite general therefore readied his troops. "He gathered together his nine hundred chariots armed with scythes, and all his army from Haroseth of the Gentiles to the torrent Cison" (Judges 4:13). Sisara then led his mighty force to the foot of Mount Thabor, a wide plain known as the Plain of Esdraelon, also called the Valley of Jezreel.

Cardinal Faulhaber tells us that "again and again, Debbora, the messenger of heaven, appears

as the motive power of the undertaking. [For,] the signal for the attack [was] given by her, not by Barac" (79). We read in Judges: "And Debbora said to Barac: Arise, for this is the day wherein the Lord hath delivered Sisara into thy hands: behold He is thy leader" (4:14). Inspired by the firm faith they saw in Debbora, Barac and his soldiers were themselves filled with unconquerable confidence. They thus went forth from the slopes of Mount Thabor prepared to fight a battle they knew they could not lose.

"Arise, for this is the day wherein the Lord hath delivered Sisara into thy hands: behold He is thy leader" (Judges 4:14).

At the head of the Israelite army, Barac led the charge toward the Plain of Esdraelon. Cardinal Faulhaber writes, "The Lord Himself fought with them, from heaven, for, by means of a frightful storm or some other natural catastrophe, He brought panic into the ranks of the enemy's army" (79). The Chanaanites thus began fleeing in all directions. In the Book of Judges, the Holy Ghost tells us that "the Lord struck a terror into Sisara, and all his chariots, and all his multitude, with the edge of the sword, at the sight of Barac . . ." (Judges 4:15). Even the Chanaanite general Sisara leaped off his chariot and fled on foot.

Barac and the Israelites pursued the panic-stricken enemy and utterly destroyed them. In truth from a human point of view, the victory of the Israelites was an impossibility. Humanly speaking, the Chanaanites' 900 iron chariots should have mowed down the Israelites like blades of grass. Such, however, was not the case. Instead, the poorly equipped Israelite footsoldiers had their way with the Chanaanites. This is yet another proof of the truth of Saint Paul's words to the Corinthians: "But the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the strong" (I Cor. 1:27).

— Mount Thabor, Lower Galilee, Israel



What became of Sisara—the cowardly Chanaanite general who abandoned his men on the field of battle? Debbora had already foretold his fate when she told Barac that “Sisara shall be delivered into the hand of a woman” (Judges 4:9). Her prophecy had yet to be fulfilled. And, little did Sisara know, as he ran from the battle, he was running to the fulfillment of Debbora’s prophecy.



At length, Sisara came upon a little camp. Standing outside one of the tents was a woman name Jahel. The exhausted and fearful Sisara saw the camp as a place of safety and thus sought refuge there. Jahel approached him and offered him a place in her tent. “Come in, my lord,” she said to him, “come in, fear not” (Judges 4:18).

Sisara entered Jahel’s tent and was “covered by her with a cloak” (Judges 4:18). This suggests that Sisara was terrified and sought to be hidden from his enemies. Thirsty and worn out from fighting and running, he then asked Jahel for a drink of water. After receiving a cup of milk instead of water, Sisara then asked her to stand guard at the door of her tent and not to let anyone know that he was inside. She agreed, and soon Sisara fell into a deep sleep.

While she stood guard, Jahel, though not an Israelite, must have remembered that her forefathers had followed the prophets and had been friendly toward them. Remembering this, there grew in her a desire to help the Israelites.

What happened next is among the most graphic descriptions in the Bible. This is what happened as is related in the Book of Judges:

Jahel, Haber’s wife, took a nail of the tent, and taking also a hammer: and going in softly, and with silence, she put the nail upon the temples of [Sisara’s] head, and striking it with the hammer, drove it through his brain fast into the ground: and so passing from deep sleep to death, he fainted away and died. (4:21)

While all this was happening in Jahel’s tent, Barac was tracking down Sisara. His search brought him to the tent of Jahel. There, he found her with a blood-soaked hammer in hand. “Come,” she said to him, “and I will show thee, the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, he saw Sisara lying dead, and the nail

fastened in his temples” (Judges 4:22).

It was thus through the leadership of Debbora that the Israelites won a most improbable victory, and it was at the hands of a woman, as Debbora foretold, that Sisara met death. The fourth chapter of Judges closes with these words: “So God that day humbled Jabin the king of Chanaan before the children of Israel: who grew daily stronger, and with a mighty hand overpowered Jabin king of Chanaan, till they quite destroyed him” (4:23-24).

And when he came into her tent, he saw Sisara lying dead, and the nail fastened in his temples” (Judges 4:22).

At the time of Debbora, the battle that the Chosen People faced against the Chanaanites was among the many fought by the Israelites that decided their preservation or extinction. In our own time, the Chosen People of the New Testament, that is the faithful of the Catholic Church, are faced with numerous battles—spiritual battles that will decide the fate not of their race, but of their souls. It is for this reason that the Church on earth is called the Church Militant, for we, as soldiers of Jesus Christ, must fight for our salvation and for that of our fellow man.

As people of the world become more and more immoral and perverse, and as the times grow more and more evil, the spiritual war against the world, the devil, and fallen human nature has reached a whole new level. And, sad to say, many Catholic people have abandoned their posts in the Church Militant and are content to let the devil and his agents in this world have their way. Many Catholics have grown indifferent to their God-given Faith and Catholic morals. Many others are satisfied to simply look the other way when it comes to the moral issues of today, when, in fact, they should be filled with holy indignation that the law of God is being trampled upon by people of all nations. I cannot even begin to

— James Tissot. *Jael Smote Sisera And Slew Him.*



enumerate how many people I have met in airports, stores, and various other places who have told me that they were once Catholics, but who have lost their Faith. “I was raised Catholic,” they tell me. “I used to be Catholic,” they say. What happened? What has brought these poor people to such a sorry state?

We can certainly make a valid argument that the changes to Catholic worship and, consequently, to the Catholic Faith that came about in the 1960s in the wake of the Second Vatican Council account for much of it. However, the changes in the Church are not entirely to blame. Another cause for the loss of Faith is the laxity of modern-day Catholics. Like the Israelites at the time of Debbora, many Catholics today are content to remain “stuck in the mud” and just “go along” with the ways of the world, thus compromising their Faith and morals.

As in the days of the Israelites of old, we are in desperate need of leaders today who will rise up like Debbora and be beacons for their fellow men. We need leaders who will take a stand and inspire others to live as befits Catholics. Each of us can be that leader. It is true that we may not be in a position of leadership, but we can still inspire others by giving a good example.

Example is defined by the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* as “that which is a pattern to be followed or imitated.” A *good example* is thus a pattern of what is to be done for the good and thus imitated. Leading by example therefore means that our lives should be patterns for all to see what a Catholic says, does, and believes. To accomplish this, we do not have to do anything remarkable; all we have to do is be a source of edification and, by our conduct, inspire others to live up to Catholic ideals.

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But, what does this mean in the practical order? Simply, we must avoid sin, which gives bad example, and practice virtue, which gives good example. In other words, we cannot take part in the sinful entertainment of today. We cannot listen to the immoral music of the world or watch its movies and television shows which glorify mortal sin and, at times, ridicule and even blaspheme Our Divine Savior, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Catholic Church. Moreover, we can also give good example by keeping

Sundays holy, that is, by refraining from unnecessary servile work and shopping, and by not being embarrassed to go to Mass.

Furthermore, we can influence others for the good by going out of our way to lend a helping hand when someone is in need and even by practicing charity towards someone who has offended us. For instance, we can set a good example by refraining from taking part in evil conversations—gossiping about the faults of others, detraction, and calumny, to name a few.

There are so many ways we can inspire others to lead better lives, but this is especially done by courageously professing our Faith and our morals in spite of all obstacles—whether it be at home, in the workplace, in school, or wherever we might be. Our relatives, friends, and associates should know that as Catholics we will not be content to go along with the sinful ways of the world. People should know that we will not take part in the immodest fashions of today. They should know that we will not laugh at their impure jokes or use the foul language which is so common. Catholics and non-Catholics alike should see that we are not afraid to pray in public, especially Grace before and after meals.

Our Divine Savior Himself extolled the power and importance of good example in His Sermon on the Mount. “So let your light shine before men,” Our Lord said, “that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). What Our Savior



means is that the example we give is so powerful that it can influence countless people and even move them to glorify Almighty God by imitating it.

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Countless devotees of false religions fearlessly practice and profess their faith in the public eye. In fact, about a month ago I was traveling to Saint Paul, Minnesota. As I was making my way through the airport, I saw a Jewish man quietly sitting off to the side covered with his prayer shawl and reciting his prayers. Did he care what people thought or fear to pray in public? Not a bit! This is not an isolated case for I have also seen Muslims bowing toward Mecca while saying their prayers to the false god Allah. They, too, are not afraid to do this in public. Why, then, should we who have the one true Faith and worship the one true God have any qualms about practicing our Faith in front of others?

People learn from example. What a powerful means we have, then, to teach others. We can make such a difference in this world—a difference for the better. Debbora rose to the occasion when her people needed her. Let us do the same. Let us stand up for our Faith and our fellow man by leading with the example of a good Catholic life.

There is no telling how many people we can set on the right road by our conduct. The former U.S. president Ronald Reagan once said that “the greatest leader is not necessarily the one who does the greatest things. He is the one that gets the people to do the greatest things.” If we, with the help of our heavenly Mother, do our part,



there is no telling what great good we can inspire others to accomplish. Nor is there telling how many souls we can be instrumental in leading to the eternal kingdom of heaven. This is undoubtedly the greatest thing a leader can get people to do.

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