



# Dolorosa

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

AUGUST 2019

## A STEP BACK IN TIME



# LENT TO THE LORD

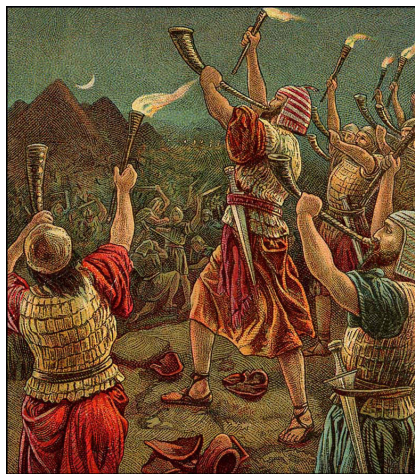
Adapted from a talk given by Father Paul Krug  
at the 2019 Ladies' Communion Breakfast in Round Top, NY

In the days of the Judge Debbora, the Israelites sinned against Almighty God, and, as a result, they were punished by being taken into captivity by the Chanaanites. After the Israelites had repented of their sins, God raised up Debbora to spur them on to break free of the Chanaanite tyranny. Forty years of peace followed. But, the Israelites were fickle. Thus, we read in the Book of Judges: "The children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord: and He delivered them into the hand of Madian seven years. And they were grievously oppressed by them" (6:1-2).

The Madianites laid waste to the Israelite territory, they settled in their lands, and they destroyed many of their fields. At length, the Chosen People repented and cried to God for help. In his *Bible History* Father George Johnson, Ph.D., writes, "God heard their cries and called Gedeon to lead His Chosen People against the invaders" (155). Gedeon raised an army numbering only 300, and with divine protection and assistance, he overthrew the Madianites.

Gedeon, who became a Judge of Israel, presided over the Chosen People for forty years. "But after Gedeon

was dead," we read in Judges, "the children of Israel turned again. . ." (8:33). They fell into idolatry. This time God punished them by allowing the Philistines to make war upon them. Father Johnson tells us, "[The Philistines] invaded the territory of the Israelites and took possession of the cities which belong to the tribes of Juda, Dan, and Benjamin" (158).



Gedeon, Leading the Charge Against the Madianites

At this time, Samson was born. His birth had been foretold by an angel who commanded his parents not to cut the hair of their child, nor permit him to drink wine or other strong drink. Samson was thus dedicated to the service of God and was destined to wreak havoc on the Philistines. However, as Father Johnson points out, "unlike the other Judges, he had no army, but depended on his own wonderful strength" (159). The secret of Samson's strength was in his long hair

The Book of Judges recounts the feats of Samson as he waged war against the enemies of Israel. One day, however, he revealed the secret of his strength to Dalila, a wretched woman who was bribed by the Philistines to discover the secret of Samson's strength.

She thus treacherously cut his hair while he slept and then summoned the Philistine soldiers to capture him. The soldiers first plucked out Samson's eyes and afterward imprisoned him. Eventually, he was brought from the prison to a banquet hall where several thousand people were gathered. The purpose of bringing Samson there was so that the guests might amuse themselves by tormenting him.

What happened next is well described by Father Johnson. He writes:

When [Samson] entered the banquet hall, he told the boy who was leading him to place him near the pillars that supported the building, that he might lean against them and rest. Then, calling upon the Lord to restore to him his former strength, Samson took both pillars in his hands and shook them. The house fell, and Samson, the princes of the Philistines, and a great number of people were killed. (161)



Samson, Bringing Down the Pillars

Many years passed after the death of Samson. The Israelites teetered between fidelity and infidelity to God. There was even a certain amount of strife in their own ranks.

At length, the history of the Chosen People, and in particular, that of the Judges, continues in the First Book of Kings, also known as the First Book of Samuel. The sacred book opens with the story of a certain holy woman. Her name was Anna, and she lived in 11 B.C. Modern authors, as well as Protestants, often call Anna Hannah.

Anna was the wife of a virtuous man named Elcana. They lived in the land of Rama, which was just north of Jerusalem. For one reason or another, according to God's providence, Anna was unable to bear children. This deeply grieved her. Although her husband attempted to comfort her, she was heartbroken. She prayed and prayed, but it seemed that God would not give her the answer she sought.

One day, Anna traveled with Elcana to the city of Silo. There, before the door of the Tabernacle—a small Temple that housed the Ark of the Covenant—she knelt

and poured out her heart to God. In *Dramatic Stories of the Bible*, Father Thomas D. Williams points out that “[Anna], with all the earnest longing of her heart, prayed that God would give her a son; and, as she prayed, the tears that bespoke her grief flowed abundantly from her eyes. . .” (331). “O Lord of hosts,” she prayed, “if Thou wilt look down on the affliction of Thy servant, and wilt be mindful of me, and not forget Thy handmaid, and wilt give to Thy servant a son: I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life. . .” (I Kings 1:10-11).

As Anna prayed, the high priest whose name was Heli was sitting at the door of the Tabernacle. He happened to notice Anna in prayer. She was crying and moving her lips, but because she was praying silently in her heart, it looked as though something was wrong with her. Seeing this, Heli, for some reason, thought that she was drunk. In *Women of the Bible*, Michael Cardinal Faulhaber tells us that perhaps “the storm of conflicting emotions which was raging deep down in Anna's soul may have expressed itself outwardly in sudden gestures, in the quivering of her features, in sentences cut short by her sobs” (56). At any rate, Heli approached Anna and rebuked her as a drunkard. “How long wilt thou, be drunk?” he said to her. “Digest a little the wine, of which thou hast taken too much” (I Kings 1:14).

To this unwarranted and humiliating rebuke, Anna could have responded in the same vein. However, she answered with meekness and humility, and this response was surely more of a rebuke to Heli than if she had spoken harshly. “Not so, my lord,” she said, “for I am an exceeding unhappy woman, and have drunk neither wine nor any strong drink, but I have poured out my soul before the Lord” (I Kings 1:15). The sincerity of Anna's words moved the heart of Heli. And so, as if to make amends, he replied with words of benediction. “Go in peace,” he said, “and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition, which thou hast asked of Him” (I Kings 1:17).



Anna, Praying at the Door of the Tabernacle

Anna thus went away from the Tabernacle a changed woman. She was no longer downcast and sorrowful, for as we read in the Sacred Scriptures: “her

countenance was no more changed” (I Kings 1:18). In other words, Anna no longer had a look of sadness and depression. What was the reason for this sudden change? It was her renewed confidence in God. Anna knew God would hear her prayer as the high priest had assured her and that He would answer it in the way that was best for her. So, she left it in His hands.

In due time God did bless Elcana and Anna with a son. They named him Samuel, which means “God heard.” When Samuel was only three years old, Anna fulfilled the promise she made to God. With her husband, she brought Samuel to the Tabernacle. There, she presented the young boy to the high priest Heli so that he might be trained in the service of God. Addressing Heli, Anna said:

I beseech thee, my lord, . . . I am that woman who stood before thee here praying to the Lord. For this child did I pray, and the Lord hath granted me my petition, which I asked of him. Therefore I also have lent him to the Lord all the days of his life.

(I Kings 1:26-28)

After leaving their little boy with the high priest, Elcana and Anna stopped to spend some time in adoration. Anna poured out her heart in love, gratitude, and humility to Almighty God. This prayer has come to be known as the *Cantic of Anna*.

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*“For this child did I pray, and the Lord hath granted me my petition, which I asked of him. Therefore I also have lent him to the Lord all the days of his life.”*

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Each year Elcana and Anna would return to Silo on the appointed days to offer sacrifice at the Tabernacle. During these visits they would have the opportunity to spend some time with Samuel, and each time Anna would present him with a coat that she made for him. How often she must have thought of him! How much she loved him! Writing of these visits, Cardinal Faulhaber says:

We can easily imagine with what joy mother Anna thenceforth took part in the pilgrimages of her people to Silo, and with what motherly care she provided her child, always growing taller and taller, with clothes for winter and summer. But on the other hand with what homesickness too, Samuel counted the days till the next feast of pilgrimage. (59)

For the remainder of her life, Almighty God continued to reward Anna for dedicating her son to Him. He blessed her with five more children: three sons and two daughters. In this we see how richly God rewards the



—Gerbrand van den Eeckhout. *Hannah presenting her son Samuel to the priest Eli*. 1665.

sacrifice of what is most precious to us.

Anna is truly a wonderful example of many virtues. Among those that most stand out are her perseverance in prayer and confidence in God. However, she is also an example of something that we desperately need today—she is a model of praying for vocations.

In the ninth chapter of his Gospel, Saint Matthew relates that Our Divine Savior “had compassion on the multitudes. . .” (9:36). Christ felt for the multitude because, as Saint Matthew tells us, “they were like sheep without a shepherd” (9:36). In other words, the people had no one to show them the way to heaven, and no one to help them get there. Our Lord saw this. And so, turning to His disciples, He lamented the fact. “The harvest indeed is great,” He said, “but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:37-38).

What Christ meant was that there is a very great number of souls to save, but very few laborers to help save them. He was not exaggerating. There was a real lack of laborers at His time, and there is a real lack of laborers today, for today there are indeed few priests. In fact, there may never have been a time since the days of the Apostles when there were so few true priests. Thus, how many souls will be lost because they have no one to lead them! We must, therefore, pray for laborers; we must pray for vocations.

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In light of the ever-increasing immorality, perversion, and unbelief in our world, it is clear: we need priests. We need spiritual generals who will wage war against the agents of Satan in this world to save as many souls as possible. But, sad to say, it would seem that vocations are not coming fast enough. For some reason, it is so difficult for young men to leave the world and dedicate themselves to the service of God. It would indeed seem that today's entertainment and materialism are designed to thwart young people from even entertaining the thought of a religious vocation. Because of this, how many young men there are who, like the rich young man in the Gospel, walk away from God's call.

"And behold," writes Saint Matthew, "one came and said to Him: Good Master, what good shall I do that I may have life everlasting?" (Matt. 19:16).

"Keep the commandments," Our Lord told him.

"I've kept all of them from the time I was a boy," the young man said. "I'd like to do more. What else can I do?"

Hearing this, the Sacred Heart of Jesus was moved. He was impressed that this young man was determined to do greater things for God. So, He said to him: "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come follow me" (Matt. 19:21).

What did that young man do when he heard these words? Did he eagerly say, "Yes, Lord!"? Did he thank Christ for His gracious invitation

It is currently estimated that eight billion people live in the world. How many of them are, as Our Lord put it, "like sheep without a shepherd." Many Catholic people in our country alone do not have ready access to the Mass and sacraments. How many others live throughout the world! About a month ago, I was approached by a certain man. He has family in Vietnam who do not have the Mass and sacraments available to them. On their behalf, this man appealed to me to make a trip to Vietnam to offer Mass, hear confessions, and even bless some marriages for his family. God willing, someday we might be able to make that trip and help his family. But, how many Catholics across the world are in a situation similar to this man's family? "The harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few."

*"And seeing the multitudes, he had compassion on them: because they were distressed, and lying like sheep that have no shepherd. Then he saith to his disciples, The harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into his harvest."*

Since the time of Aaron, the first priest of the Old Testament, God has set His priests as leaders over the faithful. He has given them the mission to show people the way to heaven and to help them get there.

In the New Testament priests help souls chiefly by offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and administering the sacraments, for it is by means of the Mass and Holy Communion that the faithful receive the grace they need to save their souls. This grace is indispensable in today's world. It is through the Sacrament of Penance that the faithful are forgiven their sins and are restored to the grace of God. However, these sacred means, which are necessary to save our souls, are not possible without the holy priesthood.



—Heinrich Hofmann. *Christ and the Rich Young Ruler.*

to follow Him and work with Him for souls? No. This is what he did: “And when the young man had heard this word, he went away sad: for he had great possessions” (Matt. 19:22).

This young man had a call to follow Christ—a divine call to be a collaborator with Him in the work of saving souls. But, he walked away from it because he did not want to leave the world and the things of the world. I fear that many young people today do the same, especially since Saint Alphonsus Liguori and Saint John Bosco both believe that “in general, for every three children, there is one vocation.” In examining the number of young Catholics and the number of religious vocations today, the numbers just don’t match up. And so, we must persevere in carrying out Our Lord’s request: “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:38).

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On the first Sunday of each month at many of our chapels across the country, the priests ask that the faithful offer their Mass and Holy Communion for an increase of vocations to the priesthood and religious life and that they join in a private prayer after Mass for the same intention. We call this Sunday Vocation Sunday. We do this in imitation of a number of devout Catholic mothers who, many years ago, lived in the Italian village of Lu. The village had only about 4,000 inhabitants. One day, a group of mothers met to discuss what they considered a crisis: their village was not producing any religious vocations. They thus decided that something had to be done. So, after having obtained permission from their parish priests, they agreed to receive Holy Communion on the first Sunday of each month and to remain after Mass to recite prayers for vocations. In the space of a few decades, God heard their prayers and blessed this little village with five hundred vocations. We, therefore, dedicate the first Sunday of the month to praying for vocations in the hopes that Almighty God will hear our prayers as He heard the prayers of those mothers.

However, this does not seem to be enough. We must pray more often than once a month for vocations; we must pray for them every day. Let us strive to be the Annas of the New Testament. Anna pleaded with God to bless her with a son whom she would dedicate to His service. God blessed her with Samuel who served God as a young boy and became a priest and who also constituted the first of the great prophets of Israel as well as the last and greatest of the Judges. Like Anna, we, too, must pray



for spiritual sons—and spiritual daughters—that they may answer God’s call and dedicate themselves to His service and that they may selflessly pray, sacrifice, and labor for the salvation of souls.

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*Like Anna, we, too, must pray for spiritual sons—and even spiritual daughters—that they may answer God’s call and dedicate themselves to His service and that they may selflessly pray, sacrifice, and labor for the salvation of souls.*

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In the life of Anna, we see how one woman’s prayers and sacrifices moved Almighty God to bless her and her people with a priest, a prophet, and a judge in the person of Samuel. In our lifetime, we may never see how many religious vocations were effected by our prayers and sacrifices. Yet, how glorious will it be to know in eternity that we made a difference. How glorious it will be to know that a vocation was embraced or even saved by our prayers and that because of that vocation, numerous souls were saved which otherwise would have been lost.

As we pray God to inspire vocations in our young men and women, let us pray also for our Catholic parents that they may be faithful in doing their part to foster vocations in their children. The seed of a religious vocation is planted by God but cultivated by one’s parents

and relatives. How sad it is that some Catholic parents do not encourage vocations among their children! In *The Holy Eucharist*, Saint Alphonsus echoes these same sentiments. He writes:

It is surprising, in this matter, to see some fathers and mothers, even though fearing God, yet so blinded by a mistaken fondness, that they use every effort and exhaust every means, to hinder the vocation of a child who wishes to become a religious. This conduct, however (except in very rare cases), cannot be excused from grievous sin. (380)

We should, therefore, pray for our Catholic parents that they may be generous like Anna and willing to “lend their children to the Lord all the days of their lives,” and that they may be supportive and encouraging of religious vocations among their children.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary obtain for our young men and women the grace to realize that they can make a difference in this world by following God’s call. May she impress upon them the greatness and importance of the priesthood, the brotherhood, and the sisterhood so that they may generously enlist themselves in the army of Christ to fight for the salvation of souls, for it is no exaggeration to say that as a result of answered vocations, countless souls will be saved that otherwise would be lost.



### *Prayer for Vocations*

Why stand ye all the day idle? Go ye into my vineyard.

V. Ask the Lord of the harvest.

R. That He send laborers into His vineyard.

Let us pray

O God, Who willest not the death of the sinner, but rather that he be converted and live; grant, by the intercession of the Blessed Mary ever virgin and of all the saints, laborers for Thy Church, fellow laborers with Christ, to spend and consume themselves for souls. Through the same Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen.