



# Dolorosa

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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A STEP BACK IN TIME

## THE PEACEMAKER OF ISRAEL

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Samuel's birth marked a new chapter in the history of the Chosen People. During his lifetime, the Israelites sought a new form of government—one which was not what God had intended for them.

To better understand what took place, one must look back to the origin of the Israelites. Abraham was the Father of the Chosen People. Moses led them out of captivity and bequeathed to them the Law of God. Josue was the General of the Israelites who led them into the Promised Land and orchestrated a number of brilliant victories over the pagan tribes that dwelt there. It was thus that the twelve tribes of Israel came to settle in the Promised Land.

Before he died, Josue gave his people words of wisdom and warning. It was a warning, however, that the Israelites did not heed. Writing of this in *Christ the King: Lord of History*, Anne Carroll tells us that

Joshua warned the people to choose no earthly king to rule over them. Instead, they were to rely on God alone as their king. In time of emergency one or another individual would be called by God to unite Israel briefly and lead the armies until the emergency was over. Those leaders were called Judges. . . . (32)

Though the Israelites were successful in battle under the Judges, eventually they had to face their greatest threat up to that time: the Philistines. The Philistines were

an enemy so fierce that the Israelites could not stand against them. The Chosen People were soundly defeated over and over again. And so, for about one hundred years, they lived subject to Philistine rule.

It was at this time that the Israelites began to grow hopeless. "In desperation," writes Anne Carroll, "the people began to beg for a king, turning to holy Samuel, who had served as their Judge under Philistine oppression, and begged him to appoint a king over the land so that they could be like other nations" (32).

Samuel knew that Josue had warned the Israelites about the danger of having an earthly king to lead them instead of trusting in God. So, when the people clamored to him for a king, he sought guidance from Almighty God. How did God respond to this lack of confidence in His Chosen People? We read in the First Book of Kings: "And the Lord said to Samuel: Harken to the voice of the people in all that they say to thee. For they have not rejected thee, but Me, that I should not reign over them" (8:7). Almighty God proceeded to inform Samuel, as Anne Carroll explains, "that He would send a king, so that the Jews could learn the lesson that earthly kings could never bring lasting peace and happiness to their land" (32-33).

After receiving instructions from God, Samuel summoned Saul, a military leader, to





—Samuel Anoints Saul as the First King of Israel

anoint him as the first king of Israel. “And Samuel took a little vial of oil,” we read in Sacred Scripture, “and poured it upon [Saul’s] head, and kissed him, and said: Behold, the Lord hath anointed thee to be prince over His inheritance, and thou shalt deliver His people out of the hands of their enemies, that are round about them” (I Kings 10:1).

Under King Saul the Israelites were victorious in battle as long as Saul was obedient to God. But, Saul was too self-willed. Rather than submit to the will of God, Saul wanted to do things his own way. He thus sought to rule on his own terms, not on God’s. Because of this, the Israelite army suffered a reversal of fortune. They began losing battles under Saul. We may imagine how frustrated the Israelites grew and how quickly their esteem of Saul dropped in the face of such sudden adversity. Saul certainly sensed that he was losing his people, and he, no doubt, began to fear for his kingship. This fear was increased when he saw a young shepherd boy named David win the acclaim of the Israelites by defeating the mighty Philistine giant Goliath with nothing but a slingshot and a stone.

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In time Saul was overcome with a vicious jealousy. The praise of the people for David produced in Saul anger which rivaled that of Cain for his brother Abel. Like Cain,

Saul sought to kill David. Saul, however, was unsuccessful in his attempts. David continually eluded him. At length, Saul, having forsaken God and succumbing to despair, committed suicide amid a losing battle with the Philistines. At the insistence of the Israelites, David, who had already been anointed by Samuel, was appointed the next king of Israel. He was only thirty years old.

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It was during Saul’s pursuit of David that an event occurred which contains an important lesson for anyone who would follow Christ. After the death and burial of Samuel, David fled with 600 men into the wilderness of Pharan. While camping in a cave, David realized that he had to provide for his men. He was informed that a man named Nabal lived nearby.

Nabal lived with his wife Abigail in the town of Maon, but he also owned land near Carmel. He was the owner of three thousand sheep and one thousand goats. Nabal was thus very wealthy, but he was as rude and ill-tempered as he was rich. Abigail was a beautiful and prudent woman who must have been equally patient and charitable to put up with a man like Nabal.





One day, Nabal was shearing his sheep near Carmel. When David heard about it, he sent ten young men with orders to go to Carmel, find Nabal, and speak to him on his behalf. David instructed them to say to Nabal: "David greets you and sends his warmest wishes to you, your family, and all that belongs to you. He heard that you were shearing your sheep, and he wants to let you know that although your shepherds have been with us, we have not harmed them." Continuing with David's message, the men informed Nabal that nothing which belonged to his shepherds was stolen. Then, in conclusion they said, "In return David asks you to receive us with kindness. Please give what you can to us, your servants, and to your dear friend David" (See I Kings 25:6-8). It was in this way that David attempted to obtain provisions for his men.

David's servants delivered the message to Nabal, but Nabal would have nothing of it. We read in the First Book of Kings:

Nabal answering the servants of David, said: Who is David? and what is the son of Isai? servants are multiplied nowadays who flee from their masters. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and the flesh of my cattle, which I have killed for my shearers, and give to men whom I know not whence they are? (25:10-11)



Having received this callous response from Nabal, the men returned to David and informed him that Nabal refused to give them anything. This enraged David. "Let every man gird on his sword," he cried out (I Kings 25:13). After fastening his own sword, David then set out for the household of Nabal with an army of 400, leaving 200 men behind with the supplies.

Meanwhile, one of Nabal's servants had the intuition to know what David was going to do. And so, he went to Abigail and set the situation before her. "David sent some messengers from the wilderness to greet Nabal and ask some provisions," he said, "but Nabal sent them away harshly. These men were very kind to us, and all the time we were with them in the fields, they did not bother us or steal our belongings." Continuing, the servant said, "The whole time we were with them looking after our flocks, David's men protected us. Please give this some thought and decide what to do," he concluded, "for this could be disastrous not only for Nabal, but for the whole household. He is a proud man and will not listen to anyone" (See I Kings 25: 14-17)."

After patiently hearing the servant, Abigail realized she had to take action. So, without informing Nabal, she quickly gathered two hundred loaves of bread, two vessels full of wine, five roasted sheep, two bushels of dried corn, a hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of dried figs and loaded them onto donkeys. Abigail then told her servants to go ahead of her to meet David; she followed at some distance.

At length, Abigail and her servants met David and his army. When she saw him, she quickly dismounted and threw herself on the ground at David's feet, and said to him, "Please, my lord, hear me. It's my fault. Don't mind Nabal. He is exactly what his name means—a fool. I wasn't there when your servants came seeking provisions, but if I had been, I would have supplied them with what







I could” (See I Kings 25:24-25). To conclude her plea for peace between David and Nabal, Abigail offered David the many gifts she had brought from home.

As he listened to Abigail, David was relieved that he would not, after all, have to fight. “Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me,” David exclaimed. “May you also be blessed,” he added, “for what you have done in preventing me from taking revenge. Indeed, if you had not hurried to meet me, I swear by the living God of Israel that all of Nabal’s men would have been dead by morning” (See I Kings 25:32-34). Then, David took what Abigail had brought him and said to her, “Go in peace to thy house, behold I have heard thy voice, and have honored thy face” (I Kings 25:35).

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In the fifth chapter of his Gospel, Saint Matthew records Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. Throughout this sermon Our Divine Savior sought to teach his hearers how to lead better lives and ultimately how to save their souls. Among the many things Christ spoke of in this

discourse was being the salt of the earth, of letting one’s light shine before men, of the dangers of anger, of the importance of forgiveness, and of the necessity of calmly but resolutely banishing impure thoughts from one’s mind. However, before He addressed these topics, Our Lord enumerated what we know as the eight Beatitudes. In *The Great Commentary*, Cornelius á Lapide tells us that “These eight Beatitudes are, as it were, the eight paradoxes of the world. For the world and philosophers place blessedness in wealth, not in poverty; in loftiness, not in humility; in satiety, not in hunger; in joy, not in mourning, and so on” (1: 196). In other words, the eight Beatitudes consist of practices that may seem absurd in the eyes of the world, but which are, in fact, our map to heaven.

The seventh Beatitude is “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matt. 5:9). Cornelius á Lapide explains that in saying this

it is as though Christ said, “The world calls blessed those who bravely wage war, and subdue their enemies, but I pronounce those to be blessed who reconcile those who quarrel and fight, and recall them to peace and union among themselves and with God. This, indeed, is a work arduous and difficult, but one most pleasing to God.” (1:221-222)

How pleasing to God, then, were Abigail’s actions! By her prudence and will to act, Abigail averted what



would have been a violent and bloody exchange between David and Nabal. She was in the true sense of the word a peacemaker, for she mediated between her husband and David.

Undoubtedly, most people desire peace. However, it would seem that few are willing to make it. In today's culture there exists a confused notion of what it means to be a peacemaker. Many people have the idea that being a peacemaker means remaining passive in the face of adversity, or staying out of an argument or a feud that is raging between two parties. This clearly is not what it means to be a peacemaker, for to make peace, one must do something, not remain passive and inactive. Others believe that *peacemaker* is synonymous with *peacekeeper*. This, too, is erroneous. Peacekeepers often operate on fear. They hate conflict and will do whatever it takes to avoid it. Such persons will hide their true feelings and opinions so as not to upset anyone. Sadly, peacekeepers are often willing to compromise their values, and at times even their Faith, to avoid confrontation.

Our Divine Savior certainly does not want this. The "peace at any price" mindset is not what He was advocating in the eight Beatitudes. He did not say, "Blessed are the peacekeepers"; He said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." A peacemaker actively works to resolve discord. He engages conflict not to incite it, but to settle it. Like Abigail, a peacemaker takes action.

Some people are natural peacemakers, others must work to acquire the ability. Perhaps Abigail falls into the first category, but it is more probable that she had

to learn the art of peacemaking by experience, especially considering her husband's brusque personality. She therefore knew that self-control, humility, and words appropriate to the situation could achieve more than violent language, bitterness, and going to war. This is something that we, too, must realize.

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Peacemaking is indeed an art. It is a skill often acquired through practice. Whether it is making peace between oneself and another or between two parties at odds, peacemaking can be tricky business. So, what do we have at our disposal to make the business of peacemaking run smoothly? Here are a few suggestions.

### Prayer

Prayer should be our go-to tool when it comes to making peace. We should ask the Holy Ghost to enlighten our minds on how best to handle the situation. We should pray to know the correct words for the given state of affairs and the charity, prudence, and meekness to say them at the right moment. If someone has wronged us, we should pray for the grace to forgive and the strength to do our part to end the conflict. We must remember, though, to persevere in our prayer no matter the circumstances, confident that if we ask His help, God will assist us in achieving the best outcome.

### Take the First Step

Sometimes making peace means that we have to take the first step towards reconciliation. To this one might argue, "Why should I take the first step when so-and-so is the one who wronged me?" Very simply, because peacemakers take the initiative. If Abigail had waited for David to plead for peace, her husband and household would have been destroyed. Conflict is not resolved by accident, but by action. The first step may be a letter, a phone call, a visit, or, I suppose in this age of technology, a text message or an email. Depending on the circumstances, such a step might even take a bit of heroism. But, with God's grace and our efforts, we can do this for the love of God and for the sake of peace. So, if someone has injured us in some



way or we have wronged someone else, let us do our part today to put an end to the hostilities and coldness.

### *Refrain from Gossip*

One of the most damaging vices to the art of peacemaking is gossip. Gossip has the potential to turn a peacemaker into a troublemaker, for the gossip by his words pours fuel onto the fire of disagreement and runs the risk of causing an explosion. The 19th-century American congressman Frank A. Clark once rightly said: "Gossip needn't be false to be evil – there's a lot of truth that shouldn't be passed around." So, whether the gossip is true or false, we must be on guard against spreading news and reports of others, especially those who have offended us. If someone gossips to us, we must not entertain it, but we should be ready to make excuses for the third party and help the gossip to do the same.

### *Self-Control*

When it comes to making peace between ourselves and another, we must control our emotions. Anger is the strongest of the eleven passions that we all have, and it tends to get out of control quickly if it is not repressed at the outset. We must therefore be on guard against manifesting it, for it is detrimental to the peacemaking cause. Let us be watchful of our tone of voice and body language as well as our word choice. Tone of voice, in particular, has

the power to inflame or quench the sparks of anger in a disagreement. In theory this practice is simple, but when emotions are high, it can be hard to stay calm. Let us pray for the grace and persevere in our endeavors to practice meekness and control our emotions, and, in time, we will notice a change for the better.

### *Humble Yourself*

Perhaps the most striking detail in the story of David, Nabal, and Abigail is that Abigail did absolutely nothing wrong, but to pacify David, she took the blame for Nabal's foolishness. Abigail humbled herself to prevent strife. There may, at times, be dissensions when we, too, will not be at fault. At such times, we must imitate Abigail's humility and be the bigger person by taking the blame and apologizing first. It will, no doubt, sting our ego, but what is a little prick to our pride when it will prevent years of argument, bitterness, and heartache?

### *Don't Get Anxious*

If a feud is brewing and we're caught in the middle, we should seek to reconcile the adverse parties, but we shouldn't get anxious if progress is not being made. We must do our part and leave the rest in God's hands. The same goes for our disagreements with others.

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If we put these peacemaking techniques into practice and persevere in our efforts, we will receive an honor that far surpasses all worldly distinctions: we will be worthy, as Christ said, to be called children of God. It is true that in virtue of the Sacrament of Baptism, we are all adopted children of God. However, peacemakers enjoy this honor to a greater degree. Cornelius á Lapide tells us that "peacemakers shall be called and shall be the sons of God and heirs of God in celestial glory, which they shall inherit as the reward of their efforts to make peace" (1:223).

Let us strive, then, to be peacemakers in this strife-filled and hateful world. May Our Lord, the Prince of Peace, and Our Blessed Mother, the Queen of Peace, assist us in our endeavors that we may be numbered among those special children of God who were peacemakers on earth and who are found worthy to be partakers of the everlasting peace that only God can give and which nothing can take from us.

