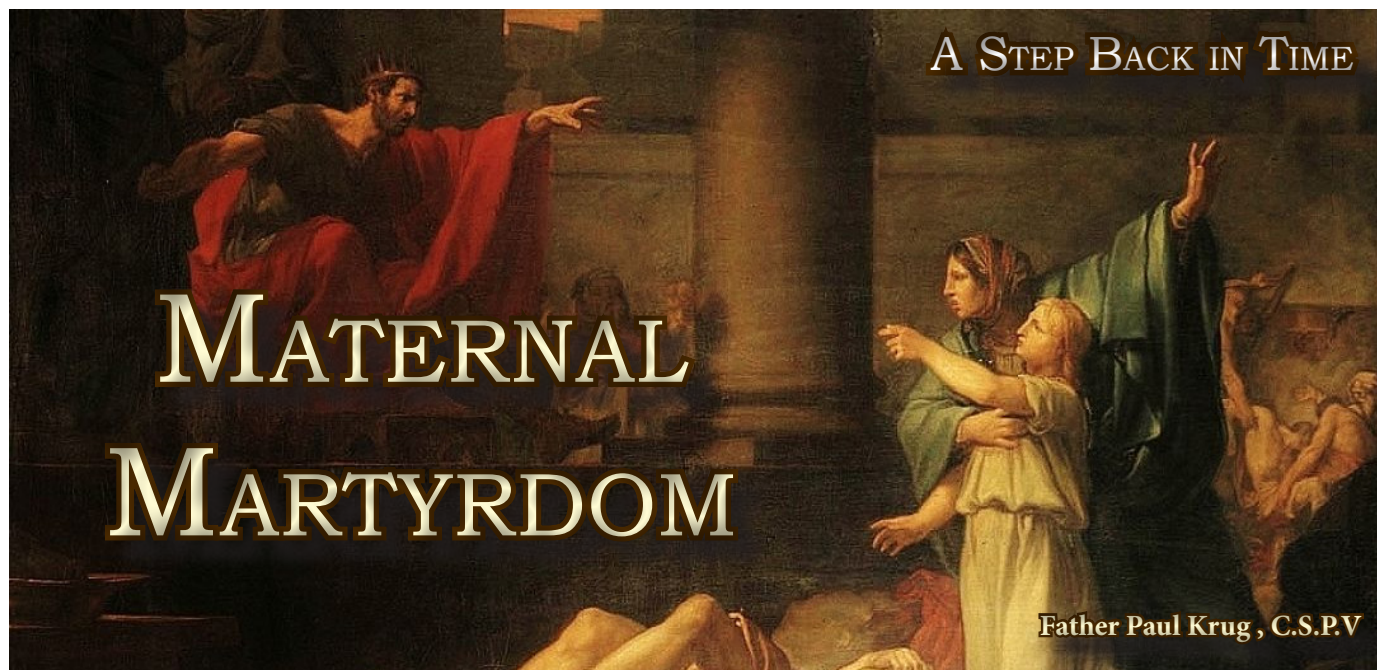




Dolorosa

4TH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

MAY 2020



Throughout the course of history, many wicked men have oppressed the people of God. From the Old Testament to the New Testament to today, evil men have enacted laws in opposition to the Divine Law, and they have persecuted the faithful of all times. This was the case in 167 B.C. In that year Antiochus IV, the King of Persia, stormed Jerusalem at the head of his army. After slaughtering nearly 40,000 Israelites, he then turned his fury towards the Temple. He ordered the Jewish priests to be executed within the sanctuary of the Temple and then commanded the sacred vessels to be desecrated and broken into pieces. The Holy Books were torn and burnt. An image of the Greek god Zeus was soon set up in the Temple. Thus, the Temple of the true God was made the temple of a pagan god.



Next, Antiochus issued an edict to the whole nation. In this decree he proclaimed that the worship of the pagan Greek gods was henceforth the official religion of the nation. All were forbidden to practice any religion but that of the State. Furthermore, the Jews were forbidden to observe the laws of God. The penalty for transgressing the laws of the State was death.

The soldiers of King Antiochus went throughout the Holy Land. They went to every city, even to the smallest towns and villages, to set up altars to the pagan gods. The inhabitants were then ordered to participate in the pagan sacrifices. If they refused to participate, they were killed on the spot. Once a month, a search was made for copies of the Sacred Scriptures, and those who had them in their possession were put to death.

While the situation at the time certainly looked bleak, there is a silver lining. In *The Book of Books*, Henri Daniel-Rops writes:

In all this misfortune there is a lesson to be learned which we should remember, for it has been proved true in many other places besides Palestine. The lesson is that a nation can only die when it has lost the will to survive and its respect for its glorious traditions. (152)



Thus, while it is true that many Jews abandoned their God-given Faith and became traitors by taking part in the pagan rituals, an even greater number refused to comply. These faithful Jews possessed the will to survive and respected the traditions of their faith. They, therefore, remained loyal to God and chose to die rather than violate His holy Law. Among them were a mother and her seven sons.

Sacred Scripture makes no mention of this mother's name. Her husband's name and the names of her children are also unknown. Nothing is known about her life and circumstances except for the heroism she displayed in the face of persecution.

We read in the seventh chapter of the Second Book of Machabees that during the persecution of King Antiochus, seven brothers and their mother were brought before the King. Antiochus ordered them to break the law of God by eating swine's flesh. The pork was brought before them, but, faithful to God's command not to eat the flesh of swine, they adamantly refused. They were thus taken and scourged. In the midst of his torments, the eldest boy declared, "We are ready to die rather than to transgress the laws of God, received from our fathers" (II Mach. 7:2).

These words angered the King. So enraged did he become that he ordered large frying pans and cauldrons to be heated to scalding temperatures. He then commanded that the tongue of the son who had spoken be severed and that his scalp be torn off. And, as if this were not enough, the tyrant also ordered the soldiers to chop off the young man's hands and feet. Finally, after all of this, he was brought to the fire and fried alive.

While the heroic youth endured these barbaric cruelties, his mother and brothers were made to watch. They did not, however, merely stand by; instead, they supported the young man by their words and encouraged one another to die manfully for their God.

"In all this misfortune there is a lesson to be learned which we should remember, for it has been proved true in many other places besides Palestine. The lesson is that a nation can only die when it has lost the will to survive and its respect for its glorious traditions."

After the first brother was dead, the cruel executioners took the second and gave him a choice: to eat the flesh of the swine or to suffer like his brother. He refused to eat the swine's flesh and thus was punished in the same fashion as his brother. He died, however, with a word of warning for the king. "Thou indeed, O most wicked man," he gasped, "destroyest us out of this present life: but the King of the world will raise us up, who die for His laws, in the resurrection of eternal life" (II Mach. 7:9). With that, he expired.

When the third brother was asked to eat the pork, he responded by sticking out his tongue and stretching out his hands towards the executioners. "These I have from heaven," he said, "but for the laws of God I now despise them: because I hope to receive them again from Him" (II Mach. 7:11).

The fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh brothers all met the same fate for standing up for the law of God. In *The Women of the Bible*, Cardinal Michael Faulhaber sums up their deaths in these words:

The last speech of the fourth [son] is a "Credo" in the resurrection: "It is better, being put to death by men, to look for hope from God to be raised up again by Him." The fifth offered his blood and his life in the confidence that the blood of the martyrs would be the seed of a better future for the nation. The dying prayer of the sixth is a confession of guilt: "We suffer these things for ourselves, having sinned against our God." The seventh was once more led into temptation by enticing promises. He should choose between a life of favor and riches with the King or a death under excruciating torture. He chose what his brothers had chosen and proved his affinity of soul with them by offering as his own last speech a choice summary of the last words of his brothers. (135-136)

“Now the mother,” we read in the Second Book of Machabees, “was to be admired above measure, and worthy to be remembered by good men, who beheld seven sons slain in the space of one day, and bore it with a good courage, for the hope that she had in God” (7:20). She was indeed a valiant woman in the true sense of the word. The fidelity to God and the heroic courage her sons displayed is a testimony to this. “The mother,” explains Cardinal Faulhaber, “took part in many ways in this hero-drama (136).” Continuing, he writes: “First of all as the trainer of these heroes. We may hear in the youths’ last words, the echo of those principles which their mother had engraven on the tablets of their hearts with an iron stylus, from their childhood onwards” (136).

Like a good mother, she poured a foundation in the hearts of her children—to love God above all things and to remain faithful to Him in spite of all opposition. Then, upon this foundation, she formed their indomitable character. “Thus,” writes Cardinal Faulhaber, “her sons were by birth the blood of her blood, by training—the soul of her soul, strength of her strength; and their perseverance unto death is a triumph of the art of maternal education” (136-137).

“Her sons were by birth the blood of her blood, by training—the soul of her soul, strength of her strength; and their perseverance unto death is a triumph of the art of maternal education.”

However, this valiant mother did not merely train her children and then leave them on their own; she was there with them to the end. The Holy Ghost tells us in Sacred Scripture that “she bravely exhorted every one of them . . . being filled with wisdom: and joining a man’s heart to a woman’s thought” (II Mach. 7:21). Every cruel instrument that touched her sons pierced also her heart. But, through all of this, she exhorted each one of her sons to remain true to the faith of their fathers that they might not lose their eternal crown.

What a mother she was! For when many mothers would anxiously snatch their sons away from death, she, solicitous for their eternal salvation, anxiously implored her sons not to let themselves be snatched away from eternal life. From this, Cardinal Faulhaber concludes that her presence as well as “the glance from her eyes and the words of her mouth may have saved one of the other [of her sons] from falling away” (137). And, in the

end, she, too, met the same glorious fate, laying down her life for her God.

There’s an adage that runs: “You can’t give what you don’t have.” In other words, if one lacks charity, it is not possible for him to spread charity. If one is not humble he will not emanate humility. If one is not virtuous, he cannot teach others to practice virtue. To give to others, one must first possess what he seeks to give.

The mother of the seven sons, whom we commonly refer to as the *Mother of the Machabees*, gave her children gifts greater than anything the world can offer. She inculcated in them a deep-seated love for God and the faith of their fathers. She instilled in them a courage that was seemingly not of this world and a perseverance that rivaled that of the greatest martyrs. She taught her children these virtues and so many others. But, where did she get them?

Ultimately, the mother was blessed with such graces and virtues by Almighty God, but she had to do her part and cultivate them. God usually doesn’t just snap His fingers and make virtue grow in men. He plants the seed of virtue and waters it with His grace, but He requires that we do our part to cultivate it and make it grow. This the mother did by loving God and practicing virtue over the course of her life.

God usually doesn’t just snap His fingers and make virtue grow in men. He plants the seed of virtue and waters it with His grace, but He requires that we do our part to cultivate it and make it grow.

Throughout *A Step Back In Time*, we took a glimpse into the lives of some of the women from the Old Testament who played a part in the history of Israel. The





lessons we learned from these women are summed up in the life of the Mother of the Machabees. This we know from her words and actions as well as from those of her children who learned from her. Let us now recap all the lessons we've learned by considering the martyrdom of the mother and her children in relation to the Old Testament women we have considered.

Dealing with Temptation

This staunch mother did not dally with temptation as Eve so imprudently did. King Antiochus, no doubt, offered her and her family the easy way out, but not for a moment did she entertain it. She gave it no consideration whatsoever but instead turned to God in prayer for the strength to resist the tyrant. How do we act in time of temptation? Do we imitate Eve or this mother? Do we heedlessly entertain temptation or do we banish it immediately?

They Did Not Laugh at God

We learned how Sara, the wife of Abraham, doubted God because she lacked a certain amount of confidence in Him. As a result, she laughed at Him when He informed Abraham that she would bear a child in her old age. The Mother of the Machabees, on the other hand, was a model of confidence and trust. "Doubt" was not in her vocabulary. She knew that God was in control no matter what happened. No matter how viciously she and her sons were tortured, no matter how much she suffered, she had confidence that God would help her family through the trial and that He would reward them with heaven for their perseverance. When we are beset with sufferings and trying times, do we act as Sara or as this valiant mother? Do we begin doubting divine providence and lose confidence in God, or do we renew our confidence with a little prayer, such as "My God, I trust in Thee. I leave this in Thy hands"?

Pillars of Salt or Pillars of Faith?

When Almighty God poured down fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gommorha to punish the inhabitants for their filthy sins of impurity, Lot fled with his family. His wife, however, disobeyed God and curiously looked back to the burning cities. She was punished by being turned into a pillar of salt. The Mother of the Machabees certainly did not indulge her curiosity and she instilled this mindset in her children. Not one of them gave into curiosity as to what their life could be like if they would but yield to the king's command and deny their Faith. They were focused on the task at hand, they had their eye on the prize of heaven, and this made them the pillars of faith that they were. In our daily lives, do we follow the example of Lot's wife by indulging our curiosity in things that don't concern us: gossip, news-seeking, and idleness? Or, do we imitate this faithful family by striving to walk in the presence of God and to remain focused on the practice of our Faith and the duties of our state? Will we be pillars of salt or pillars of faith?

Anger Held No Sway

In the Book of Numbers, we saw how Moses' sister, Miriam, gave way to anger fueled by jealousy and was punished for it by God. In the Second Book of Machabees, we see in the mother and her children no anger or animosity towards their executioners. They suffered meekly and certainly forgave those who hurt them. They are thus a powerful example from which we can learn how to quench the fire of anger and how to suffer misfortune and offenses patiently and even forgivingly. Let us ask ourselves, "When the passion of anger flares within me, do I strive at once to check it, or do I give it free rein like Moses' sister? Am I a Machabee or a Miriam?"

Filial Fidelity

Another thing that stands out in the martyrdom of these faithful souls is their love for one another. The mother truly loved her children, and the children truly loved their mother with the piety of Ruth. They always looked out for one another and desired what was best for one another. Thus, a true spirit of charity reigned in their family. This is especially seen in their martyrdom. Amid their torments, each member of the family encouraged the other by word and example to persevere in achieving victory over this world. Let us examine ourselves on this point and see if we always look out for our family members and desire only what is best for them. If, however, we have been negligent towards our parents or siblings, let us renew our determination to practice piety towards them by helping them and praying for them each day.

Heroic Leaders

Debbora was a true leader of the Israelites during days of turmoil. Likewise, the Mother of the Machabees and her children possessed heroic leadership qualities when times were hard. They set an example not only for the Israelites of their times but for the faithful of all times. Their heroic example has, without a doubt, influenced countless generations to hold fast to their faith rather than trade it for what the world has to offer. Let us strive each day to be leaders like Debbora and this holy family by our good example. “The greatest leader,” said Ronald Reagan, “is not necessarily the one who does the greatest things. He is the one that gets the people to do the greatest things.” Each of us can be that leader in our times.

Answering the Call of Patriotism

From the words and example of the mother and her children, it is evident that they were staunch patriots like Judith. This is seen in the fact that the fifth son laid down his life with the prayer that his blood would be the seed of a better future for his nation. Like the Israelite nation, the United States today is in need of patriots who will sacrifice for it. We can be those patriots by praying for America and offering the little inconveniences of daily life for our nation. The United States does indeed need the aid of our prayers and sacrifices if it will ever again be what it once was. Will we answer the call?

Peacemaking Without Compromise

This heroic family also followed in Abigail's footsteps in that they were willing to make peace with their persecutors on condition that they were not forced to compromise their beliefs. They obeyed the just laws of

the State; they were upstanding citizens. This, however, was not enough for the tyrant. He demanded compromise of faith and morals, and they rightly refused. They are therefore glowing examples of the peacemakers we ought to be.

Marked by Prudence

In their responses to Antiochus, both the mother and the Machabee children manifested a prudence like Queen Esther. They surely prayed for light to know what to say and how to say it, and they certainly reflected before speaking. How we ought to follow their example in our day-to-day affairs!

Conquerors of the Inner Job's Wife

Finally, unlike Job's wife, who rebelled against God's Will and tempted her husband to abandon his trust in divine providence, all eight of these holy Israelites knew that God loved them and would only permit what was best for their souls. They thus had unbounded confidence in the divine plan. Though they did not see the plan as God saw it, they nonetheless trusted in it and resigned themselves to God's Will. They refused to let the inner voice of Job's wife dictate their course of action; rather they placed themselves in the hand of God.

Conclusion

Our days are not so different from the times in which this mother and her children lived. Our Faith and morals are attacked constantly and on all sides. We thus need to be modern-day Machabees and instill their virtues in ourselves and our children. While we are not enduring a bloody persecution, there may come a time when we will be faced with the same situation as that mother and her children. We may have to stand up for our Faith in the face of civil authorities. Let us be ever ready to do so and let us prepare now by living each day as faithful Catholics, keeping the Commandments, practicing the virtues, avoiding the occasions of mortal sin, and setting a Catholic example for others.

May the example of this devoted family and the lessons learned from the women of the Old Testament inspire us to be the valiant Catholics our times call for. May our step back in time encourage us to continue marching bravely forward in these days of uncertainty. And, may we be filled with great confidence as we run the race towards heaven, knowing that with Our Divine Savior and His Blessed Mother on our side, it is a race we cannot lose.