**SATURDAY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**

# Comfort of the afflicted

Once we wrote: God is the Comfort of the afflicted, the derelict, the suffering, the condemned. God comforts us through redemption, deliverance, new creation, the gift of Christ and his Holy Spirit. God's comfort fills the heart with sweet hope. In God and by his power, in Christ and by his grace, in the Holy Spirit and by his truth, man too shares this divine mission: to be a comforter of the afflicted. All of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments reveal this truth. Here are two passages from the New Testament: *“Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, "Are you discussing with one another what I said, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me'? Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy. When a woman is in labor, she is in anguish because her hour has arrived; but when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy that a child has been born into the world. So you also are now in anguish. But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you. On that day you will not question me about anything. Amen, amen, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you.” (Jn 16,19-23). “For it is surely just on God's part to repay with afflictions those who are afflicting you, and to grant rest along with us to you who are undergoing afflictions, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his mighty angels, in blazing fire, inflicting punishment on those who do not acknowledge God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal ruin, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power, when he comes to be glorified among his holy ones and to be marveled at on that day among all who have believed, for our testimony to you was believed.” (2Ts 1,3-10).*

Here some quotations from the Old Testament: *He will be your comfort and the support of your old age, for his mother is the daughter-in-law who loves you. She is worth more to you than seven sons! (Rt 4,15). I chose the way for them and sat as their chief; I dwelt as a king among his troops; I was like one who comforts mourners. (Jb 29,25). I, it is I who comfort you. Can you then fear mortal man, who is human only, to be looked upon as grass,? (Is 51, 2). And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always (Jn 14,16). The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name - he will teach you everything and remind you of all that (I) told you. (Jn 14,26). "When the Advocate comes whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, he will testify to me. (Jn 15,26). But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. (Jn 16,7).*

Now let us ask ourselves: what is the Virgin Mary's mission in this divine work of comforting the afflicted? She is not an occasional, temporary, occasional Comfort. She is not even Comfort of some afflicted. She is the Consoler, indeed she is the Consoler by mission, science, intelligence, intercession, art, prayer, fulfilment. We can say that comfort is what the Mother is called to do by her supernatural motherhood. Hers is a special, unique comfort. She must help us live every suffering making of it a perfect sacrifice, in Christ, with Christ, through Christ, through the Holy Spirit, to be offered to the Father for our perfect sanctification and to cooperate with Christ in the sanctification and growth of his body that is the Church. She lives her mission for the greatest good of all her children who are disciples of her Son, but also towards every other child who has not come to faith in Christ the Lord yet. She is the Comfort of humankind. Wherever there is weeping, affliction, sorrow, loneliness, war, death itself, there is the place of the Mother of Jesus. How does the Virgin Mary comfort? By intervening directly before her Son Jesus and before her other children, so that each one may do his part in the great miracle of joy to be brought back into hearts. She comforts by making Herself an active instrument of relief, peace, joy, solace. There is no human suffering that the Virgin Mary does not make her own, that She does not present to her Son Jesus, that She does not cure directly, intervening through such mysterious ways that only the soul that receives her comfort knows. History attests that the Virgin Mary is truly the Mother of comfort and joy.

Today we add: Two figures of the Virgin Mary in the Old Testament are the Mother of the Seven Maccabees brothers and the God-fearing Woman of the Book of Proverbs.

From the Second Books of Maccabees: *“It also happened that seven brothers with their mother were arrested and tortured with whips and scourges by the king, to force them to eat pork in violation of God's law. One of the brothers, speaking for the others, said: "What do you expect to achieve by questioning us? We are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors." At that the king, in a fury, gave orders to have pans and caldrons heated. While they were being quickly heated, he commanded his executioners to cut out the tongue of the one who had spoken for the others, to scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, while the rest of his brothers and his mother looked on. When he was completely maimed but still breathing, the king ordered them to carry him to the fire and fry him. As a cloud of smoke spread from the pan, the brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die bravely, saying such words as these: "The Lord God is looking on, and he truly has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his canticle, when he protested openly with the words, 'And he will have pity on his servants.'"*

*When the first brother had died in this manner, they brought the second to be made sport of. After tearing off the skin and hair of his head, they asked him, "Will you eat the pork rather than have your body tortured limb by limb?" Answering in the language of his forefathers, he said, "Never!" So he too in turn suffered the same tortures as the first. At the point of death he said: "You accursed fiend, you are depriving us of this present life, but the King of the world will raise us up to live again forever. It is for his laws that we are dying."*

*After him the third suffered their cruel sport. He put out his tongue at once when told to do so, and bravely held out his hands, as he spoke these noble words: "It was from Heaven that I received these; for the sake of his laws I disdain them; from him I hope to receive them again." Even the king and his attendants marveled at the young man's courage, because he regarded his sufferings as nothing. After he had died, they tortured and maltreated the fourth brother in the same way. When he was near death, he said, "It is my choice to die at the hands of men with the God-given hope of being restored to life by him; but for you, there will be no resurrection to life."*

*They next brought forward the fifth brother and maltreated him. Looking at the king, he said: "Since you have power among men, mortal though you are, do what you please. But do not think that our nation is forsaken by God. Only wait, and you will see how his great power will torment you and your descendants." After him they brought the sixth brother. When he was about to die, he said: "Have no vain illusions. We suffer these things on our own account, because we have sinned against our God; that is why such astonishing things have happened to us. Do not think, then, that you will go unpunished for having dared to fight against God."*

*Most admirable and worthy of everlasting remembrance was the mother, who saw her seven sons perish in a single day, yet bore it courageously because of her hope in the Lord. Filled with a noble spirit that stirred her womanly heart with manly courage, she exhorted each of them in the language of their forefathers with these words: "I do not know how you came into existence in my womb; it was not I who gave you the breath of life, nor was it I who set in order the elements of which each of you is composed. Therefore, since it is the Creator of the universe who shapes each man's beginning, as he brings about the origin of everything, he, in his mercy, will give you back both breath and life, because you now disregard yourselves for the sake of his law." Martyrdom of Mother and Sons*

*Antiochus, suspecting insult in her words, thought he was being ridiculed. As the youngest brother was still alive, the king appealed to him, not with mere words, but with promises on oath, to make him rich and happy if he would abandon his ancestral customs: he would make him his Friend and entrust him with high office. When the youth paid no attention to him at all, the king appealed to the mother, urging her to advise her boy to save his life. After he had urged her for a long time, she went through the motions of persuading her son. In derision of the cruel tyrant, she leaned over close to her son and said in their native language: "Son, have pity on me, who carried you in my womb for nine months, nursed you for three years, brought you up, educated and supported you to your present age. I beg you, child, to look at the heavens and the earth and see all that is in them; then you will know that God did not make them out of existing things; and in the same way the human race came into existence.*

*Do not be afraid of this executioner, but be worthy of your brothers and accept death, so that in the time of mercy I may receive you again with them." She had scarcely finished speaking when the youth said: "What are you waiting for? I will not obey the king's command. I obey the command of the law given to our forefathers through Moses. But you, who have contrived every kind of affliction for the Hebrews, will not escape the hands of God. We, indeed, are suffering because of our sins. Though our living Lord treats us harshly for a little while to correct us with chastisements, he will again be reconciled with his servants. But you, wretch, vilest of all men! do not, in your insolence, concern yourself with unfounded hopes, as you raise your hand against the children of Heaven. You have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty and all-seeing God. My brothers, after enduring brief pain, have drunk of never-failing life, under God's covenant, but you, by the judgment of God, shall receive just punishments for your arrogance.*

*Like my brothers, I offer up my body and my life for our ancestral laws, imploring God to show mercy soon to our nation, and by afflictions and blows to make you confess that he alone is God. Through me and my brothers, may there be an end to the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation." At that, the king became enraged and treated him even worse than the others, since he bitterly resented the boy's contempt. Thus he too died undefiled, putting all his trust in the Lord. The mother was last to die, after her sons. Enough has been said about the sacrificial meals and the excessive cruelties. (2Mac 7,1-42).*

From the Book of Proverbs: *“When one finds a worthy wife, her value is far beyond pearls. Her husband, entrusting his heart to her, has an unfailing prize. She brings him good, and not evil, all the days of her life. She obtains wool and flax and makes cloth with skillful hands. Like merchant ships, she secures her provisions from afar. She rises while it is still night, and distributes food to her household. She picks out a field to purchase; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She is girt about with strength, and sturdy are her arms. She enjoys the success of her dealings; at night her lamp is undimmed. She puts her hands to the distaff, and her fingers ply the spindle. She reaches out her hands to the poor, and extends her arms to the needy. She fears not the snow for her household; all her charges are doubly clothed. She makes her own coverlets; fine linen and purple are her clothing. Her husband is prominent at the city gates as he sits with the elders of the land. She makes garments and sells them, and stocks the merchants with belts. She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs at the days to come. She opens her mouth in wisdom, and on her tongue is kindly counsel. She watches the conduct of her household, and eats not her food in idleness. Her children rise up and praise her; her husband, too, extols her: "Many are the women of proven worth, but you have excelled them all." Charm is deceptive and beauty fleeting; the woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. Give her a reward of her labors, and let her works praise her at the city gates. (Pr 31,10-31).*

When the history of the disciple of Jesus becomes suffering, cross, martyrdom for Christ Jesus, because of His name and His Gospel that we live according to the way given to us by the same Gospel, like the Mother of the Maccabees, the Virgin Mary must accompany us to Golgotha and remain at the foot of our cross, praying and interceding for us in order to have all strength in the Holy Spirit to make our life an acceptable offering, in Christ, to our Father. If She does not accompany her children to Golgotha and remain at the foot of their cross, suffering is not experienced. One may rebel against the Lord or even fall away from the faith and slip into a vision of life read according to the thought of the world and no longer according to the thought of Christ Jesus. On the other hand, if the disciple of Jesus clings to the Virgin Mary, he is led by Her to live his life with an ever clearer, more perfect, holier faith. Without her help, living every cross will not be possible, neither small nor great. She is the Comfort in every cross. Virgin Mary, Mother of the Redemption, be our Comfort in every moment of our lives. **03 November 2024**