

□ Reading time: 9 min.

In 1868 St John Bosco printed a publication entitled 'Wonders of the Mother of God invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians'. It was his contribution to making the Virgin Mary known not only under the most important title, that of "Mother of God", but also as "Help of Christians". It was She who had asked: "Our Lady wants us to honour her under the title of Mary Help of Christians". We begin today to present this work of hers.

Aedificavit sibi domum. (Prov. IX,1).
Mary built herself a house.

To the reader

The title of *Auxilium Christianorum* attributed to the august Mother of the Saviour is not a new thing in the Church of Jesus Christ. In the holy books of the Old Testament Mary is called the Queen who stands at the right hand of her Divine Son clothed in gold and surrounded by variety. *Adstitit Regina a dextris tuis in vestitu deaurato, circumdata varietate*: Psalm 44. This mantle gilded and encircled with various gems and diamonds are like the many gems and diamonds, or titles by which Mary is usually called. Therefore, when we call the Blessed Virgin the Help of Christians, it is but to name a special title which befits Mary like a diamond above her gilded garments. In this sense Mary was hailed as the Help of Christians from the earliest days of Christianity.

A very special reason why the Church in recent times wants to mention the title of *Auxilium Christianorum* is given by Archbishop Parisis in the following words: "Almost always, when the human race has found itself in extraordinary crises, it has been made worthy, in order to come out of them, to recognise and bless a new perfection in this admirable creature, Mary Most Holy, who is the most magnificent reflection of the Creator's perfections here below." (Nicolas, page 121).

Today's universally felt need to invoke Mary is not particular, but general; no longer are the lukewarm to be inflamed, sinners to be converted, innocents to be preserved. These things are always useful anywhere, with any person. But it is the Catholic Church itself that is assailed. It is assailed in its functions, in its sacred institutions, in its Head, in its doctrine, in its discipline; it is assailed as the Catholic Church, as the centre of truth, as the teacher of all the faithful.

And it is precisely in order to merit special protection from Heaven that Mary

is invoked, as the common Mother, as the special Helper of Kings, and of Catholic peoples, as Catholics throughout the world!

Thus the true God was called the God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, and such an appellation was directed to invoke divine mercy on behalf of all Israel, and God enjoyed being prayed to in this way, and brought ready succour to his people in their afflictions.

In the course of this booklet we shall see how Mary has truly been established by God as the help of Christians; and how at all times she has shown herself to be such in public calamities, especially in favour of those peoples, sovereigns and armies that suffered or fought for the Faith.

The Church therefore, after having honoured Mary several centuries with the title of *Auxilium Christianorum*, finally instituted a special solemnity in which all Catholics unite with one voice to repeat the beautiful words with which this august Mother of the Saviour is greeted: *Terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinata, tu cunctas haereses sola interemisti in universo mundo.*

May the Blessed Virgin help us all to live attached to the doctrine and faith of which the Roman Pontiff, Vicar of Jesus Christ, is the head, and obtain for us the grace to persevere in holy divine service on earth so that we may one day join her in the kingdom of glory in heaven.

Chapter I. Mary recognised with symbols as help of the human race.

Among the means God employs to prepare human beings to receive some great good, it is chiefly that of announcing it long beforehand. For this reason the coming of the Messiah was announced four thousand years beforehand and preceded by many symbols and prophecies.

Now Mary, the august Mother of the Saviour, the true helper of Christians, was too great a blessing not to be pronounced equally with figures representing to human beings the various favours she would do to the world.

Eve, Sarah, Rebekah, Mary sister of Moses, Deborah, Susanna, Esther, Judith represent in special ways the glories of Mary as the distinguished benefactress of the chosen people, or as a rare model of all virtues.

The tree of life, Noah's ark, Jacob's ladder, the burning bush, the ark of the covenant, David's tower, the fortress of Jerusalem, Solomon's well-guarded garden and sealed fountain, the rose of Jericho, the star of Jacob, the morning sunrise, the aqueduct of clear waters, are some of the many symbols that the Catholic Church applies to Mary and with which it is customary to explain some of her heavenly privileges or heroic virtues. We will choose only some of these symbols with the application that the Church or the most accredited writers of Mary's glories usually

give to them.

We therefore read in the book of Ecclesiasticus that the Holy Spirit puts these words into Mary's mouth: "*Sicut aquaeductus exivi de Paradiso*" like an aqueduct I came out of Paradise. (Eccl. 24:41).

An aqueduct is a channel that serves to receive the waters of the spring and lead them according to the distribution of the rivulets and the need of the flowers to irrigate the land. And in order for the aqueduct to serve its purpose, St Bernard says, it must be long to receive the waters on one side and convey them to the flowers; and Mary is a very long and abundant aqueduct because above all other creatures she was able to ascend to the throne of the Most High and draw from the fountain of heavenly graces and spread them abundantly among men. That is why, St Bernard continues, people lacked the torrents of graces for so long. It is because they lacked an aqueduct capable of communicating with God as the true source of graces and spreading them over the earth. But Mary was precisely this channel that was unblemished by inviolate trust, most humble by virginity, hidden by love of solitude, admirable by true humility, diffusive by piety, abundant in waters by fullness of grace, defended by the custody of the senses, not of lead, but rather of gold by royal nobility and sublime charity.

Through this aqueduct, says Cardinal Ugo, the waters of grace are transmitted to the Church; hence it is that the devil, the enemy of all our good, seeks to impede the course of these salutary waters by making war on the devotion of Mary; in the same way that Holofernes, not being able to conquer the city of Bethulia otherwise, ordered the course of the river that introduced the waters into the city to be cut off and diverted.

The most blessed Virgin Mary is also figured under the type of a great queen, saying King David in his psalms: *Adstitit regina a dextris tuis in vestitu deaurato, circumdata varietate* (Ps. 44). And why is Mary queen? Why stand at the right hand of Jesus in a golden robe, surrounded by variety? She is queen because of the great power she has in heaven as Mother of God; she sits at the right hand of Jesus to appease his indignation, to help us in our miseries, to be our helper, our sovereign advocate.

A good lawyer must have diligence, power with the judge, authority with the royal court, and knowledge in handling cases. And David in that text encloses precisely these four gifts in Mary in the most eminent degree. She stands at the right hand of the judge, *adstitit a dextris* almost to check that divine justice does not overcome mercy, this is supreme diligence. *Adstitit regina*, now everyone knows that the queen undoubtedly has great power over the judge's soul, interceding before the sentence is passed, and obtaining pardon if the sentence is already

pronounced. *In vestitu deaurato*, the golden robe is an image of Mary's wisdom, because gold represents wisdom. *Circumdata varietate*, surrounded by variety, that is, endowed with the multiplicity of the merits and glories of the saints. For in Mary is found the gold colour of the Apostles, the red of the martyrs, the blue of the confessors and the white of the virgins. All these saints surround Mary and proclaim her their queen because she possessed in the highest degree the various virtues that these saints in particular possessed.

That if we consider Mary already seated in heaven upon a throne of glory, we find her raised to the highest dignity to which any creature can rise. For we do not find Mary in the class of virgins, in the order of confessors, in the ranks of the martyrs, in the sacred college of the Apostles, in the choir of the Patriarchs and Prophets as a mere member almost one of them. She surpasses in excellence all the heavenly hierarchies and sits upon a throne of most precious workmanship at the right hand of the King of heaven Jesus Christ her Son as true Queen and Lady of all Paradise.

Daniel Agricola in the work known as *De corona duodecim stellarum*, explaining this text of David, says that Mary stands at the right hand of Christians to help them, because the Latin word *adstare* means to stand by one to assist him. The same author also continues to unfold the text and observes that the Latin word *adstare* in this place also means to stand in defence, and Mary stands at our right hand to defend us from the constant assaults of the demons.

St Jerome, when the word *varietate* is found in the Latin text, explains that while the other princesses and queens go dressed in sumptuous garments, Mary is girded and covered with shields with which she defends her children. This sense seems to agree with the other in scripture: *Mille clypei pendent ex ea, omnis armatura fortium*.

The prophet David, narrating the exit of the Hebrew people from Egypt says that they had a cloud that guided their steps by day, and a pillar of fire that lightened their path by night. St Bernard applying the properties of that cloud and pillar to Mary, says that as the clouds defend us from the excessive ardour of the sun, so Mary protects us from the fire of heavenly vengeance and the flames of concupiscence. Now as the pillar of fire shed light upon the steps of the people of Israel, so does Mary illumine the world with the rays of her mercy and the multiplicity of her graces. What would we blinded wretches do in the darkness of this century if we did not have this beneficent light, this luminous pillar? (D. Ber. Serm. de Nativ. B. M.).

But for all other miseries does not the sweetest Queen of Heaven give us help? Blessed James of Varazze applying to her the words of the Ecclesiasticus: *In*

Jerusalem potestas mea, says that Mary offers us her help in life, in death and after death. Such is Mary's power that she can extend it to these three times. If we have a friend (this writer argues) who benefits us in life, it is certainly a good thing for us; but if he is such as to benefit us even at the point of death, it is a greater good; if then his power comes to help us even after death, then it is a greater good. Now Mary bestows on us precisely this threefold good. In fact, the holy Church, in the praises that she has the faithful sing in honour of Mary, includes these three aids and exclaims: *Maria mater gratiae, dulcis parens clementiae; Tu nos ab hoste protege, et mortis hora suscipe*. First, she helps us in life; for in this life others are righteous and others sinners; now Mary helps the righteous because she preserves God's grace in them, hence she is called *Mater gratiae* mother of grace; she helps sinners because she imparts divine mercy to them, hence she is called *dulcis parens clementiae*.

Secondly, she helps us in death, because she defends us there from the wiles of the devil; for this enemy is so audacious that he not only comes to the bed of dying sinners, but to that of the saints, even using all malice to make them fall. But when one of her devotees dies, the Blessed Virgin hastens with motherly solicitude, protects and defends him, so she prays to the Church: *Tu nos ab hoste protege*, protect us from the enemy.

Thirdly, she does not abandon us even after death. It sometimes happens that at the death of some saints the Angels come and lead their souls to heaven, but when the true devotees of Mary die she comes in person and receives their souls and introduces them into the beautiful paradise. Then he adds *Et mortis hora suscipe*.

We read in Book III of Kings that Bathsheba mother of Solomon was begged by her son Adonijah to intercede with the king for a grace. Bathsheba was moved by that prayer and presented herself to the king. As soon as Solomon saw her appear, he descended from the throne, went to receive her, and even made her ascend to the royal seat and sit at his right hand, saying to her: *Pete, mater mea, neque enim fas est ut avertam faciem tuam*. Now who would dare to think that Jesus on the throne of glory, at the prayers that Mary presents to him, should be any less generous towards her than Solomon was towards his mother?

Indeed, the learned Mendoza observes here that Mary's grace and authority is so great that not only for Jesus' brothers does she intercede, but also for his enemies, and all that she asks she certainly obtains.

Moses recounts in the book of Numbers that when Mary his sister died, the waters failed. Moses tells Moses in the book of Numbers that when Mary, his sister, died, the waters ceased to abound in the desert for forty years, because of the

merits of that holy woman; and applying this to the Blessed Virgin Mary, he says that if the graces of the Church will never again fail to come to men, it is due to Mary, who first on earth and then in heaven interposed her merits before the Most High.

[\(continued\)](#)