

□ Reading time: 10 min.

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## **Chapter 7. Mary favours those who work for the faith; while God punishes those who outrage the Blessed Virgin.**

There was a time when the emperors of Constantinople carried out a violent persecution against Catholics for venerating sacred images. Among them was Leo Isauricus. In order to abolish the cult, he killed and imprisoned anyone who was denounced as having given veneration to images or relics of saints and especially of the Blessed Virgin. In order to deceive the simple people, he summoned some bishops and abbots and by dint of money and promises induced them to establish that the images of the crucified Jesus, neither of the Virgin nor of the Saints should be venerated.

But the learned and famous St John Damascene lived in those times. To fight the heretics and also to provide an antidote for Catholics, John wrote three books in which he defended the cult of holy images. The Iconoclasts (as those heretics were called because they despised holy images) were greatly offended by these writings, so they accused him of treason to the prince. They said that he had sent letters signed in his own hand to break the alliance he had with foreign princes, and that he disturbed public peace with his writings. The credulous emperor began to suspect the saint, and although he was innocent, he condemned him to have his right hand cut off.

But this treachery had a much happier outcome than he had expected, for Our Blessed Lady wanted to reward her servant for his zeal for her.

As evening came, St John prostrated himself before the image of the Mother of God, and prayed most of the night, saying: O Blessed Virgin, because of my zeal for you and the holy images, my right hand was cut off, come therefore to my aid and let me continue to write your praises and those of your son Jesus. So saying, he fell asleep.

In a dream he saw the image of the mother of God looking at him happily and saying: Behold, your hand is healed. Therefore arise and write down my glories. When he woke up, he actually found his healed hand attached to his arm.

When the news of such a great miracle had spread, everyone praised and glorified the Blessed Virgin, who rewards so greatly. Virgin who so richly rewards her devotees who suffer for the faith. But some of Christ's enemies wanted to claim that the hand had not been cut off from him, but from one of his servants, and they

said, "Don't you see that John is in his house singing and carousing as if he were celebrating a wedding feast?" So John was arrested again and taken to the prince. But here a new miracle. Showing his right hand, a shining line could be seen in it, which proved the amputation to be true.

Amazed at this miracle, the prince asked him which doctor had restored him to health, and what medicine he had used. He then loudly narrated the miracle. "It is my God" he said, "the almighty physician who restored my health. The prince then showed repentance for the evil he had done, and wanted to raise him to great dignities. But Damascene, averse to human greatness, loved private life better, and as long as he lived, he employed his genius in writing and publishing about the power of the august Mother of the Saviour (see John Patriarch of Jer. Baronius in the year 727).

If God often grants extraordinary graces to those who promote the glories of his august Mother, he not infrequently punishes terribly even in the present life those who despise her or her images.

Constantine Copronymus, son of Leo Isauricus ascended his father's throne at the time of the supreme pontiff St Zacharias (741-75). Following the impieties of his father, he forbade the invocation of saints, the honouring of relics, and the imploring of their intercession. He desecrated churches, destroyed monasteries, persecuted and imprisoned monks, and invoked with nocturnal sacrifices the help of the demons themselves. But his hatred was especially directed against the Holy Virgin. To confirm what he said, he used to take in his hand a bag full of gold coins, and showed it to those around him, saying: How much is this bag worth? Very much, they said. Throwing out the gold, he again asked what the purse was worth. When they answered that it was not worth anything, so quickly she took back the impious one, so it is of the Mother of God; for that time, that she had Christ in her, she was greatly to be honoured, but from the point that she gave him up nothing differs from other women.

These enormous blasphemies certainly deserved an exemplary punishment that God did not delay in sending to the impious blasphemer.

Constantine Copronymus was punished with shameful infirmities, with ulcers that turned into burning pustules, which made him send up high cries, while a burning fever devoured him. Thus panting and screaming as if he were burning alive, he sent out his last breath.

The son followed his father's footsteps. He took great delight in gems and diamonds, and seeing the many beautiful crowns that the Emperor Maurice had dedicated to the Mother of God to adorn the church of St Sophia in Constantinople, he had them taken and placed on his head and carried it to his own palace. But on

the instant his forehead was covered with pestiferous carbuncles, which on that very day drew to death the one who dared to thrust his sacrilegious hand against the ornament of Mary's virginal head (see Theophanes and Nicephorus contemporaries. Baronius an. 767).

## **Chapter 8. Mary protector of the armies fighting for the faith.**

Let us now briefly mention some facts concerning the special protection that the holy Virgin has constantly given to armies fighting for the faith.

Emperor Justinian recovered Italy, which had been oppressed by the Goths for sixty years. Narses, his General, was warned by Mary when he was to take the field and never took up arms without her consent. (Procopius, Evagrius, Nicephorus, and Paul the Deacon. Baronius to the year 553).

Emperor Heraclius won a glorious victory against the Persians and seized their rich spoils, reporting the prosperous outcome of his arms to the Mother of God to whom he had commended himself. (Greek Inst. art. 626).

The same Emperor triumphed again over the Persians the following year. A frightful hail in the enemies' camp routed them and put them to flight. (Greek Ist.).

The city of Constantinople was once again liberated from the Persians in a most prodigious manner. While the siege lasted, the Barbarians saw a noble matron escorted by a retinue of Eunuchs coming out of the city gate at dawn. Believing her to be the emperor's wife on her way to her husband to plead for peace, they let her pass. When they saw her going to the emperor, they followed her as far as a place called the Old Stone, where she disappeared from their sight. Then a tumult arose among them, they fought each other, and so terrible was the slaughter that their general was forced to raise the siege. It is believed that that matron was the Blessed Virgin. (Baronius).

The image of Mary carried in procession around the walls of Constantinople freed this city from the Moors who had held it besieged for three years. Already the enemy leader, despairing of victory, begged to be allowed to enter and see the city, promising not to dare any violence. While his soldiers entered without difficulty, when his horse arrived at the gate known as the Bosphorus, there was no way to make it go forward. Then the barbarian looked up and saw on the gate the image of the Virgin that he had blasphemed just before. He then turned back and took the path towards the Aegean Sea where he was shipwrecked. (Baronius year 718).

In the same year, the Saracens took up arms against Pelagius, Prince of the Asturians. This pious general resorted to Mary and the darts and thunderbolts

thrown at him backfired on the enemies of the faith. Twenty thousand Saracens were wiped out, and sixty thousand perished submerged in the waters. Pelagius together with his few had taken refuge in a cave. Grateful to Mary for the victory he had won, he built a temple to the Blessed Virgin in the cave. (Baronius).

Andrew, General of the Emperor Basil of Constantinople, defeated the Saracens in the year 867. The enemy had insulted Mary in this conflict by writing to Andrew: I will now see if the son of Mary and his mother can save you from my arms. The pious General took the insolent writing, hung it on the image of Mary saying: See, O Mother of God: see, O Jesus, what insolence this arrogant barbarian says against your people. Having done this, he rises up on his bow and commences a bloody massacre of all his enemies. (Curopalate ann. 867).

In the year 1185, the Supreme Pontiff Urban II put the Crusaders' arms under the auspices of Mary, and Goffredo Buglione at the head of the Catholic army freed the holy places from the dominion of the infidels.

Alfonso VIII, King of Castile, achieved a glorious victory over the Moors by carrying the image of Mary on his banners onto the battlefield. Two hundred thousand Moors remained on the field. To perpetuate the memory of this event, Spain celebrated the feast of the Holy Cross every year on 16 July. The banner on which was impressed the image of Mary, who had triumphed over the enemies, is still preserved in the church of Toledo. (Ant. de Balimghera).

Alfonso IX, King of Spain, also defeated two hundred thousand Saracens with Mary's help. (Idem die XXI junii).

James I King of Aragon wrested three very noble kingdoms from the Moors and defeated ten thousand of theirs. In gratitude for this victory, he erected several churches to Mary. (Idem die XXI julii).

The Carnotesi besieged in their city by a band of corsairs displayed a part of Mary's robe that Charles Calvo had brought from Constantinople on a pole as a banner. The barbarians, having thrown their spears at this relic, were suddenly blinded, and could no longer escape. The devout Carnotese took up arms and slaughtered them.

Charles VII, King of France, who was cornered by the English, had recourse to Mary, and not only was he able to defeat them in several battles, but he also freed a city from siege and brought many others under his rule. (The same on 22nd July).

Philip the Fair, King of France surprised by his enemies and abandoned by his own resorted to Mary and found himself surrounded by a prodigious host of warriors ready to fight in his defence. In a short time thirty-six thousand enemies are defeated, the others surrender as prisoners or flee. Grateful for such a triumph

to Mary, he built a church to her and there hung all the weapons he had used in the conflict. (Idem XVII aug.).

Philip Valesius, King of France, defeated twenty thousand enemies with a handful of men. Returning triumphant that same day to Paris, he went straight to the cathedral dedicated to the Virgin Mary. There he offered his horse and his royal arms to his generous Helper. (Idem XXIII aug.).

John Zemisca, Emperor of the Greeks, defeated the Bulgarians, Russians, Scythians and other barbarians, who together numbered three hundred and thirty thousand and threatened the empire of Constantinople. The Blessed Virgin sent the martyr St Theodore, who appeared on a white horse and broke the enemy ranks; whereupon Zemisca built a church in honour of St Theodore and had the image of Mary carried in triumph. (Curopalate).

John Comnenus, aided by the protection of Mary, defeated a horde of Scythians and in memory of the event ordered a public feast at which the image of the Mother of God was carried triumphantly on a chariot quilted with silver and precious gems. Four very white horses led by the Emperor's princes and relatives pulled the chariot; the Emperor walked on foot carrying the cross. (Niceta in his *Annals*).

The citizens of Ipri, besieged by the English and reduced to extremes, resorted with tears to the help of the Mother of God, and Mary appeared visibly to console them and put the enemies to flight. The event took place in 1383 and the people of Cyprus celebrate the memory of their liberation every year with a religious festival on the first Sunday in August. (Maffeo lib. 18, *Cronaca Univers.*).

Simon Count of Monforte with eight hundred horsemen and one thousand pawns defeated one hundred thousand Albigenians near Toulouse. (Bzovio Annals year 1213).

Vladislaus, King of Poland, placed his arms under the protection of the Virgin Mary, defeated fifty thousand Teutons and took their remains as a trophy to the tomb of the martyr St. Stanislaus. Martin Cromerus in his history of Poland says that this holy martyr was seen, as long as the battle lasted, dressed in pontifical robes in the act of encouraging the Poles and threatening his enemies. It is believed that this holy bishop was sent by the Virgin to help the Poles, who had recommended themselves to Mary before the battle.

In the year 1546, the Portuguese besieged by Mamudio, King of the Indies, invoked Mary's help. The enemy counted over sixty thousand men perished in the war. The siege had been going on for seven months and was already on the verge of surrender, when a sudden consternation invaded the enemies. A noble matron, surrounded by celestial splendour, appeared above a small church in the city and

shone such a light on the Indians that they could no longer distinguish one from the other and fled in haste. (Maffeo lib. 3 Hist. of the Indies).

In the year 1480, while the Turks were fighting against the city of Rhodes, they had already succeeded in planting their banners on the walls, when the blessed Virgin appeared armed with a shield and lance, with St John the Baptist and a host of armed heavenly warriors out front. Then the enemies broke free and slaughtered each other. (James Bosso *St. of the Knights of Rhodes*).

Maximilian, Duke of Bavaria, reduced a horde of heretical Austrian and Bohemian rebels to duty. On the banner of his army, he had the effigy of the Virgin Mary inscribed with the words: *Da mihi virtutem contro hostes tuos*. Give me strength against your enemies. (Jeremias Danelius. *Trimegisti cristiani* lib. 2 cap. 4, § 4).

Arthur, King of England, by wearing the image of Mary on his shield made himself invulnerable in battle; and Prince Eugene with our Duke Victor Amadeus, who wore it on their shield and chest, with a handful of valiant men defeated the 80,000-strong French army under Turin. The majestic Basilica of Superga was erected by the aforementioned Duke, then King Victor Amadeus as a sign of gratitude for this victory.

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