

The Faces of Mary in Sacred Scripture

3. *The Queen who intercedes with the King – Esther (Esther 4:9-5:5)*

The Book of Esther was written during the tempestuous and violent era in which the Maccabees, pious and observant Hebrews, were risking their lives even by defying the Persians, their rulers, who wanted to impose their pagan cults on Israel. The author intends to remind his readers that God's Providence does not abandon His People. He saves, but not through a warrior or a politician, but thanks to the young Esther, a poor orphan who had been taken as wife by the King of Persia and who became Queen. When, Aman, the King's vizier, plans to exterminate all the Hebrews in their nation, Esther puts her own life at risk to obtain salvation for her people. After having humbled herself in penance and prayer, she, together with her handmaidens and all the Jews in the city and with the help of God, succeeds in obtaining the desired grace from the King. Still, in her long prayer, the Queen does not hide her fragility: she shows herself to be both desperate and trusting, beset by anxiety and filled with hope, assailed by fear and sustained by the certainty of the Divine Presence, all at one and the same time. This parable of Esther, with its happy ending, is thus a prophecy of hope and a model of faith in God and of love for one's brothers and sisters.

In the events in the life of Esther, a poor orphan and a foreigner raised to the rank of Queen, the Church's Tradition has always seen a prefiguration of Mary, the humble girl of Nazareth who became God's spouse and collaborator for the sake of the human race. Like Esther, Mary, too, was raised to the rank of Queen by the fact of having given birth to the Messiah, the King of Israel. In antiquity, in fact, a great honor was reserved for the mother of the Sovereign: she was the one closest to the King, who consulted with her and leaned on her the most when it came to the big decisions. From the moment of her Assumption into Heaven, Mary truly sits at the right hand of the King, crowned Queen of the Angels and of the Saints. In the grand painting in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco wanted her to be pictured just this way: as the Queen Mother who embraces in her arms the King of the universe and, together with the Angels and the Saints, intercedes both day and night for us.

The Book of Esther has been handed down to us in two slightly different versions: one in Greek and one in Hebrew, complementing and completing each other. Let us suggest that you take a little time to read the book in its entirety and then stop to meditate on verses 4:9-5:5 of the Hebrew version.

Praying with the Word (*Esther 4:9-5:5*)

1. I become aware of God's presence. I imagine that I am in the scene facing Esther, who comes to find out what is going to happen to her people. I ask the Father for the grace to feel courage and the desire to intercede for my brothers and sisters in my heart, cost what it may, just as she had done.
2. I invoke the help of the Holy Spirit by slowly repeating this (or another) prayer:
"Come, Holy Spirit, open my heart to the cry of my brothers and sisters who are suffering from poverty, violence, and injustice. Instill in me courage and creativity; help me recognize in the events of my life the signs that the Father has strewn along the way to show me what path to follow to be, like Mary, a true collaborator with Jesus, our Redeemer. Amen."
3. I read *Esther 4:9-5:5* slowly and reflect a while on these three points:
 - **A vocation "for others"** (vss. 4:9-14): It is not by accident that Esther had become Queen, but a privilege that she had been given for the sake of her people! I reread my vocation story: what privileges have I received from God for the sake of my brothers and sisters?
 - **A vocation "that demands sacrifice"** (vss. 4:15-17): Esther heard the cry of her people and prepared herself to pay the price. Personally. Am I ready to pay the price for the salvation of my brothers and sisters?
 - **A "prophecy of hope" vocation** (verses 5:1-5): Esther's faith wrests that grace from God and makes her a prophecy of hope. Do I recognize and cultivate the seeds of hope in my life?
4. I finish this prayer with a heart-to-heart conversation with Mary: I express my sentiments, my joy, my gratitude, my doubts, and all my struggles to her as regard her, and my, intercessory vocation before God for the salvation of my brothers and sisters.
5. We fly to your patronage, O Holy Mother of God....

Our Father...

After having concluded this prayer, I sit still and reflect a little: What has the Holy Spirit said to me through this prayer? Has He encouraged me? Has He invited me to conversion? How do I think I may correspond to the gift received in this prayer?