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5. The Powerful Help against the Enemy – Judith 13:11-20

The Faces of Mary in Sacred Scripture

The book of Judith presents us with an exemplary account, a kind of parable, having the purpose of nourishing the faith and courage of the Israelites oppressed under Hellenistic domination. The story is developed in three scenes: in the first sweeping act, the principal personages are introduced onto the stage. (vss. 1-7) In the second, the central act, the drama is dominated by the fully-detailed figure of Judith (vss. 8-13). Powerful is the scene of Holofernes' little feast and the boldness of the widow who cuts off the head of the general with one blow of the scimitar. In the third and final act (vss. 14-16), there is the celebration for the heroine.

The central point of the story is the same one that Mary will sing in her *Magnificat*. God has the power to overturn the fortunes of those who entrust themselves to Him, exalting the weak and humbling the powerful. Trust in God, observance of the law, fidelity to the covenant are Israel's shield. The Lord intervenes at the side of his people, personally directing their struggle for freedom and bringing the just to final victory against the political powers and their lifeless idols. The book manifests apocalyptic echoes also. History is under the judgment of God, and is completely played out in two adversarial, antithetical camps: good and bad, Israel and the enemies, God and earthly powers, present time and future eternity. The clashes cannot but have this end: the triumph of Good. Divine interventions are, therefore, decisive; prayer is the remedy for all tragic situations, as the plea for the Lord's decisive action to show itself.

Looking at Judith, we see what one woman who entrusts herself totally to God can do. For this reason, the Church has seen Mary prefigured in Judith for she defeats violence and evil and the Antichrist with her humility, in the Name of her Lord. The glory of Judith, as that of Mary, is born from her ability to become a collaborator in the work of Divine salvation. A reading of the book in its entirety is whole-heartedly suggested. For meditation, we suggest some verses taken from the final part.

Praying with the Word (Judith 13:11-20):

1. I become aware of God's presence. I imagine that I am in the midst of the scene among the people who are awaiting Judith's return and I ask the Father for the grace to contemplate and to imitate her courage and her fight against evil.
2. I invoke the aid of the Holy Spirit slowly repeating this (or another) prayer:
"Holy Spirit, clothe me in the light of truth and fill me with your powerful Love! Come into me and help me recognize the depth, the height, and the beauty of my vocation as a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco's powerful Help in the struggle against evil. As you did for Mary, render me also worthy of the mission which the Father has thought of for me and bind me tightly to Jesus: to His courage, His humility, and His limitless dedication to the salvation of humanity. Amen."
3. I read this excerpt from the book of Judith 13:11-20 slowly and reflect a while on these three points:
 - **The unexpected victory of Judith** (vv. 11-14): thanks to Judith's faith and courage, God was able to intervene to save His people, in the midst of a situation that seemed desperate. Perhaps there are also desperate persons or situations near me; I shall try to regard them through Judith's eyes.

- **Holofernes is beheaded by Judith's hand** (vv. 15-16): Holofernes is the incarnation of the ancient serpent, whom God promised would be defeated by a Woman and her Offspring. (Gen 3:15) Judith knows her natural gifts, her beauty, and her astuteness, and puts them at God's disposal without fear, for the good of the people and God acts through her hand. Do I know what my natural gifts are? Am I putting them courageously at God's service, for the sake of his people?
- **The exaltation of Judith** (vv. 17-20): Judith, like Mary, is a humble woman because she is interiorly free and totally given to God and to the people. For this reason, God blesses her and the people exalt her. Have I matured in my own interior freedom and in the ability to praise God for what He is accomplishing in me and in the one who is next to me?
- 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 in the face of the evils which menace the persons whom the Lord has entrusted to me at this moment of my life.
- 5. 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?