



Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem ©
* *Knights of Malta* *

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Chancellor's Update

Advocate II

Last month the United States and to a lesser degree other parts of the world observed the tenth anniversary of the assault on the United States known as 9/11. During the time of the attack some people asked if there was significance to the choice of the date for the attack. There was a vague reference to perhaps vengeance for some battle, which the Moslems had lost.

Ironically there was a battle just casually mentioned in history books, but which was tremendously significant for Christian civilization in Europe. In 1683 the Ottoman Turks threatened to overrun Europe. They had advanced westward and were already in Vienna. Fearing for the rest of Christian Europe, the Pope, Innocent XI, appealed to the various rulers and asked for military assistance not to let Europe fall to the infidels. The response was poor, but on the day of the battle 68,000 troops, composed of Poles and smaller numbers of Germans, Italians, French, Spanish, Scots and Irish, and 9 sovereign princes came together to confront the enemy. Because he had inflicted great defeats previously on the Moslems in two recent battles, King Jan Sobieski of Poland was chosen as leader.

On September 11, 1683 they captured Mount Kahlenberg, which overlooked Vienna. The next day King Sobieski, who had placed himself under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary, attended Mass at an old chapel at the top of Mount Kahlenberg. The city was surrounded by many thousands of tents, more than 100,000 soldiers and much artillery. The battle commenced and after difficult and exhausting fighting in the mid-afternoon the Turkish forces fell back to regroup.

As Sobieski considered resuming fighting on the following day, he peered through his telescope and saw fresh Turkish troops in the distance. Sighting the Grand Vizir's tent, he saw the unfurled banner of the Prophet, an emblem of Ottoman victory. Immediately he ordered the Polish troops to lead the charge, followed by the Polish hussars (cavalry) with their sabers, pistols, lances, pennants and wings. The pounding hooves caused the Turkish leaders to flee and as many of them fell, the Grand Vizir, Kara Mustafa, upon recognizing Sobieski, was terrified, and leapt on a horse to escape. Upon receiving the Green Banner of the Prophet, Sobieski sent a messenger with the standard to the pope to indicate that the jihad had been defeated. The note to the Holy Father read, "I came, I saw, God conquered!" Christian Western Europe had been saved from the Moslems.

In gratitude to our advocate, Our Lady, for the victory for Christians the Pope established September 12 on the liturgical calendar as the feast of the Holy Name of Mary.

A century earlier the Mediterranean was covered with Mussulman fleets. Greece and Hungary were under Turkish domination. Only Malta, Cyprus and Italy lay in the way of a Turkish conquest of Europe. Christian defenders, including the Order of Saint John, were exhausted and diminished by previous battles with the Moslems. However, Pope Pius V urged them to remain at their posts if needed for battle. Once Cyprus was taken and its Latin clergy and nobles massacred, the Pope was alarmed and he requested a defense of Christendom. A small League was formed and headed by Don Juan of Austria. The Pope asked the naval officers and sailors for good conduct, fasting for three days and the daily recitation of the Rosary on their ships. He ordered Forty Hours Devotion and recitation of the Rosary in all churches of Rome.

On October 7, 1571 in the bay of Lepanto the outnumbered and out manned Christian fleet engaged in battle with the stronger Ottoman fleet. The aged pontiff fasted and prayed, as did those in monasteries. In the evening suddenly the Pope paused. He arose and told his attendants to give thanks to Almighty God. "In this very hour our fleet has engaged the Turks and is victorious." The date and hour of his prophecy were at the precise moment when the Christian fleet triumphed over the Turkish fleet.

In gratitude to Our Lady, who had intervened with Almighty God, she was awarded the titles of 'Help of Christians', 'Our Lady of Victory', and 'Our Lady of the Rosary'. October 7 is still celebrated as the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary

In the early part of the Twentieth Century the feared enemy was no longer the Moslem religion but Bolshevism. Shortly after World War I the Soviet Union worked to build its new empire. Poland, just recently reconstituted, now had to face a new aggression. Russian General Mikhail Tukhachevsky stated, "Our way to world conflagration passes over the corpse of Poland." As Bolshevik forces with a military superiority approached Warsaw on August 6, 1920 the Catholic hierarchy rededicated the Polish nation to Mary as its Queen and ordered a novena in preparation for the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady. General Pilsudski devised a defense plan for the city. After the Masses on Sunday, August 8, churchgoers in Warsaw marched in procession, praying and singing, from one church to another. The Reds reached the Vistula River across from Warsaw on August 10. Although it seemed hopeless, the novena continued. On the vigil of the Assumption Pilsudski said to the papal nuncio, Monsignor Achille Ratti, later Pope Pius XI, "We have done our best. Now it is to your prayers we look."

On August 15 the battle was about to begin. The New York Times had described the Polish forces as "ill-armed soldiers and raw groups of untrained boys". These forces also included some Polish soldiers who had fought with the allies during World War I and a number of foreign volunteers, who also were World War I veterans. A chaplain to the boy scouts, Father Skorupka, had provided the boys with confession and Mass before the battle. The first set of Polish officers was killed once the fighting commenced. The boy scouts, raw recruits, crouched in the trenches. Three times Father Skorupka tried to rouse them but failed. Suddenly he jumped over the top, raised his crucifix and shouted, "For Faith and Fatherland!" as he ran into the enemy lines and called on Jesus and Mary to save Poland. He was killed. Every Boy Scout rose up and charged the enemy with the whole Polish force behind them. Two days later the New York Times reported, "The Bolshevik flood came up against a hardened wall on the Vistula, and struck it only to be forced to recede." Poles declared that the victory was a miracle, the "Miracle of the Vistula". Military strategists had no better explanation. As British diplomat, Lord Edgar Vincent D'Abernon, in referring to this battle as one of the most decisive in world history wrote, "Almost all dangers which are successfully warded off are subsequently regarded by sceptics as having been imaginary or exaggerated. The menace to European civilization which the Bolshevik advance constituted in 1920 has been grossly underrated."

In the August 2010 issue of the Chancellor's Update Mary, the Mother of God, who now is in heaven, was presented as a powerful advocate for God's people on earth. This issue has presented three instances of Mary's advocacy to achieve physical and moral victory over insurmountable forces, when asked by the pope, Christian leaders and the faithful. In the same spirit in today's crises we ask for Mary's intercession before God. **Mary, help of Christians, pray for us.**

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Jerusalem 1048-1291, Cyprus 1291-1310, Rhodes 1311-1523, Malta 1530-1798, Russia 1798-1907, U.S.A. 1908-

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