

Homily for March 10, 2022

Thursday Lent 1

Esther's Cry

The context for today's first reading from Esther has a relevance because of the war in Ukraine. The passage begins with this arresting sentence:

Esther, seized with deadly anxiety, fled to the Lord.

Esther was the Jewish Queen of the Persian King Ahasuerus, sometime around 465 BC. At this time Persia was the dominant world power and we are told Ahasuerus:

reigned from India to Ethiopia over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces.

Within his inner circle, was a conniving man named Haman, who was given more power than anyone else among the king's advisors. He hated the Jewish people, and particularly Esther's Uncle Mordecai who would not bow down before Haman when he would pass by. Mordecai believed such gestures were to be reserved for God alone. Enraged by what Haman interpreted as Mordecai's disrespect he plots to eradicate the Jewish people who live throughout the far ranging Empire. He persuades the king to endorse his plot, and a day is set some 10 months later when the plan will be implemented.

Esther's deathly anxiety is in response to her understanding the thoroughness with which Haman will execute his plan on behalf of the king.

Notice what Esther does with her prayer that follows:

She first appeals to the Lord, naming her plight:

O my Lord, you only are our king; help me, who am alone and have no helper but you, ⁴for my danger is in my hand.

She realizes her vulnerability in the face of such calculated evil. She also feels alone and without any helper except God. Next, Esther remembers that she is part of a people who have trusted in God for hundreds of years because she knows her story:

⁵Ever since I was born I have heard in the tribe of my family that you, O Lord, took Israel out of all the nations, and our ancestors from among all their forebears, for an everlasting inheritance, and that you did for them all that you promised.¹

¹ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition](#) (Es 14:5). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

Here she states that her people have a unique identity the Lord has preserved for she speaks of their everlasting inheritance. She then ends her prayer by naming explicitly the seriousness of their predicament:

Remember, O Lord; make yourself known in this time of our affliction, and give me courage, O King of the gods and Master of all dominion! ¹³ Put eloquent speech in my mouth before the lion, and turn his heart to hate the man who is fighting against us, so that there may be an end of him and those who agree with him. ¹⁴ But save us by your hand, and help me, who am alone and have no helper but you, O Lord.²

I cannot think of a more timely prayer than Esther's as we think of the plight of the Ukrainian people. In the face the force of the Russian military, President Zelensky and his people are like Esther, looking into the mouth of a lion.

But in the midst of such a conflict there are remarkable stories of people persevering as Jesus describes in today's Gospel in order to embody the Golden Rule:

In everything do to others as you would have them to do you.

One story is of Polish mothers leaving strollers at train stations as refugees enter Poland from Ukraine so the Ukrainian mothers will have a stroller for their baby or toddler. Another story is of a man who drove from Hamburg to the Polish-Ukrainian boarder in order to take a Ukrainian family back to Hamburg.

May we in this Mass be aware of those who are at present, seized with deathly anxiety as they experience this harrowing war and dislocation that has affected their lives. May we continue to add our prayers and donate money to help bring relief to those who are contemporary Esthers.

In our own lives may we be ever more conscious of asking, seeking and knocking for the grace to live out the Golden Rule in all our relationships and so fulfill the Law of the Prophets.

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#) (Es 14:12–14). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.