

The Story of Esther, A Symbol of Courage

This week Jews around the world are celebrating the time that a spunky and comely young woman named Esther won a beauty contest and became Queen of Persia.

Her story—a tale of danger, intrigue, heroism and victory—is retold on March 3 and 4 during the holiday of Purim.

Although Purim is a colorful, lighthearted festival, it contains a very somber message for all people: tyrants arise in every age, and each generation must be ready to protect its freedom.

The Purim plot began 2,300 years ago in what is now Iran. King Ahasuerus was seeking a new queen to

be First Lady of his empire, which stretched from Africa to India. Imagine the feelings of Esther, a modest Jewish orphan raised by her uncle, Mordecai, when the king declared that of all the beautiful women candidates, she alone found favor in his eyes.

So Esther left friends and home for the strange, cloistered life of the women's palace. Mordecai was her only link to the outside world and his eagerly-awaited messages brought her news of Shushan, the capital city.

One day Esther learned that Haman, the king's villainous minister, had ordered her uncle to bow down before him. Mordecai refused, saying that Jews

bow only before God. Incensed, the arrogant Haman cunningly conspired to kill all the Jews in Persia starting with Mordecai.

Esther could have chosen to keep silent and save herself. Instead, she prayed for guidance, and then used her wits to devise a clever and courageous ploy that might save her people. Disregarding the royal rules, she approached the king, unsummoned, and charmingly invited him and Haman to a sumptuous little dinner party.

After the feast, the adoring king offered to grant his queen any request. Then Esther unmasked Haman's plan, identified herself as Jewish, and implored the king to spare her and her people.

Her daring strategy worked, and the tyrant Haman ended up on the very gallows he intended for Mordecai. Persian Jews rejoiced at their narrow escape. Since that time Queen Esther's courage has become a legend to the Jewish people.

In synagogue Purim gatherings, costumed children and adults hear the story of Esther read aloud from a scroll (called a megeelah). It must be the world's most interrupted story. Applause and cheers burst out whenever Mordecai's name is read. Raucous noisemakers, stamping feet, boos and hisses greet each mention of Haman who has come to stand for all anti-Semitic rulers throughout history.

At Purim time, Jews traditionally remember the poor with food and monetary gifts. The special Purim delicacy is a three-cornered filled cookie, hamantashen, which is said to represent Haman's hat, or his pocket or his ear.

The scroll of Esther will be chanted locally on Thursday, March 3 and Friday, March 4.

Perfect Attendance Honored

Penn Yan—Forty-two of the 78 members of St. Michael's Nocturnal Adoration Society with at least four vigils during the year have qualified for the perfect attendance award.

The society, founded in 1961 by Msgr. Joseph Sullivan, is especially proud of its young members. One of the perfect attendees is Gregory Griffin, 13, who has won the award for each of his three years of membership. Another winner, Joan Barnes, 11, received the award for 1976, her first year of attendance at the society's vigils.

CHEERLEADERS

The two cheerleading tournaments sponsored each year by the Catholic Youth Organization will take place March 5 and March 19 at Rochester Institute of Technology. The first is the state invitational meet for high school squads; the second, the diocesan tournament for parish squads. Both are public and run from 9:30 a.m. until 5:30 p.m.

figuration Jesus journeys to Jerusalem. Only when He leaves it and ascends to heaven is the journey complete. At all the principal stages of this "exodus"—the transfiguration, the resurrection and the ascension—there are two witnesses. Could these have been Moses and Elijah being with Him all the way?

On the Mount, Peter, John, and James heard a voice say, "This is my Son"—as if to say, "You were right, Peter, in your confession at Caesarea Philippi." Then the voice added, "Now, listen to him"—as if to say, "You were wrong, Peter, in not accepting His teaching about the cross." The disciples were dumbstruck. They had a long way yet to go, but this was a breakthrough. After the cross, they would remember the mountain vision, and they would believe!

Long before, when God made a covenant with Abraham, He revealed the cross also to him (R1). "Covenant" means "cutting." In those days, contracts were reinforced by the ritual of cutting animals in two and walking between the split pieces. It was a symbolic gesture, which meant, "May what happened to these animals happen to me if I break the contract."

God used this ritual with Abraham. But He did not ratify His covenant with him until Abraham had first accepted the cross. The deep, terrifying darkness that enveloped Abraham and the birds of prey swooping down on the carcasses were a vision of the terrible Egyptian slavery that would befall his people. Abraham's fighting off the birds evidenced his faith in God. So God concluded the covenant by passing through the split pieces first as a smoking brazier (symbol of suffering, which clouds life, as smoke does light) and then as a flaming torch (symbol of the glory after suffering).

So the cross confronted Abraham; it confronted Peter. Abraham believed, so did Peter eventually.

Paul laments (R2) that many are still enemies of the cross of Christ. They become such when they let go of prayer. For the Lord is our light and salvation (Response).

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 9:28-36. (R1) Gen. 15:5-12, 17-18. (R2) Phil. 3:17-4:1.

Sunday is Transfiguration Sunday. Luke, however, glosses over the phenomenon of the transfiguration. He feared his Gentile readers might confuse this with current Grecian myths about "metamorphosis." So Luke attributes Jesus' illumination to prayer—"While Jesus was praying, His face changed."

Luke is wont to associate prayer with the critical moments of our Lord's life. "Jesus took Peter, John, and James." Why did He take them? "To pray." Why to pray? Shortly before, Peter at Caesarea Philippi had confessed that Jesus was the Messiah. Having brought them that far, Jesus began to teach that the Messiah had to suffer, and so would they. Peter protested. Jesus exploded and called Peter "a devil."

Here was something that was going to be hard to accept: the doctrine of the cross. So He brought Peter, John and James onto a mountain to pray—to pray His acceptance of the cross and to pray that His apostles too would accept it.

The power of prayer, especially the prayer of Jesus is immediately evident. He is changed (prayer ought always to change us). And Moses and Elijah appear. And what were they talking about? "His passage (in Greek the word is *exodos*) which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem." Luke, like Matthew, saw Jesus as the new Moses—but as inaugurating a new Exodus. The new Exodus is Jesus going out from the earthly Jerusalem through the "red sea" of the cross, to the heavenly one, the right hand of the Father. Accordingly, after the tran-

COURIER-CALENDAR

- Holy Family** — Rosary Society supper 6:30 p.m. March 9. Reservations by March 7 with Mrs. Dan Lupiani, 254-2339, or Mrs. John Swartz, 328-5404.
- Our Lady of Lourdes** — St. Patrick's Day celebration, 7:30 p.m. Saturday, March 12, school hall, 165 Rhinecliff. Reservations: 244-6613 or 461-3467.
- St. Charles** — Spaghetti dinner March 6 in school hall, 1:30-6 p.m. Information or reservations: 663-2436 or 663-8666.
- St. James** — Rosary Society meeting 8:15 p.m. March 7 in church; Father Francis Feeney to speak on The Benefits of Spiritual Reading.
- St. Thomas More Club** — Cabin party at Knollwood Lodge, Northampton Park, 2-10 p.m. Sunday, March 6. All singles 18-35 welcome.
- Divorced, Separated Catholics** — Northeast group: 7:30 p.m. March 6, St. Joseph's Church, 43 Gebhardt Rd., Penfield; Sister Diane Branch, parish pastoral assistant, on Christ's Humanity Northwest group: 7:30 p.m. March 6, St. Charles Borromeo, Dewey Avenue at Maiden Lane; Joan Wilson of Monroe Community College on Living Assertively Single.
- Spina Bifida Association** — Salute to benefactors at awards banquet March 5, Marriott ballroom.
- National Secretaries Association** — Flower City Chapter's annual fashion show, 12:30 p.m. March 12, Holiday Inn downtown. Reservations: Ninetta DiBella, 262-3048.
- Solar Healing** — Non-credit course at Monroe Community College on eight consecutive Wednesday evenings, 7:30-8:30 p.m. beginning March 9. Information: Office of Community Services, 275-9318.
- Re-entry '77** — Information sessions at SUC Brockport for adults interested in attending college: 9:30 a.m. Wednesday, March 9; 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 15; 9:30 p.m. Thursday, April 14, Morgan Hall III. No fee. Details: 395-2755; 395-2755.

- Dinner-Theater Benefit** — For Parents Anonymous, by Greece Area Branch, American Association of University Women: The Owl and the Pussycat played by Puvabba Productions at Plantation Party House, 1875 Hilton-Spencer Road, Friday, March 18. Social hour 6:30 p.m.; dinner 7:30. For reservations: checks payable to Greece Area Branch, AAUW, for \$9 per person, mailed to Tickets, 46 Saddlehorn Drive, Rochester 14626, by March 11.
- Lunchtime Theatre** — The Loves of Betsy Ross, by Arlene Brent Fanale, 12:15 p.m. today and tomorrow at GeVa, 168 S. Clinton.
- GeVa Evening Theatre** — Relatively Speaking, by Alan Ayckbourn, tonight through Saturday, March 5, at 8; Sunday at 4 p.m.
- Brighton Theatre Guild** — Hello Dolly! March 11, 12, 17, 18, 19, at Brighton High School. Ticket information: 473-3220.
- Senior Citizen Matinees** — Love from a Stranger, 1937 melodrama starring Ann Harding, Basil Rathbone, 1:30 p.m. tomorrow, Dryden Theatre, Eastman House. Next Thursday, March 10, The Crystal Ball, 1943 comedy, Paulette Goddard and Ray Milland.
- Syracuse Stage** — Three performances of Sleuth, Anthony Shaffer thriller, at Nazareth Arts Center, 8:30 p.m. March 10-12.
- Sherlock Holmes is Alive and Well!** — Film and lecture series at Rochester Museum's Eisenhart Auditorium starts March 11, 8 p.m., with Buster Keaton's 1924 silent parody Sherlock Jr., and 1925 Lost World, starring Wallace Beery, Lewis Stone.
- Aquinas Institute** — Annual card party 8 p.m. March 5 at school, 1127 Dewey.
- Brotherhood Celebration** — Musical entertainment, speeches, refreshments, sponsored by NAACP, YWCA, others, 4-8 p.m. Sunday, March 6, at the Y, 175 N. Clinton. Free.
- Photography Show** — Work of Richard F. Urban, assistant professor of classics at St. John Fisher College on exhibit in college library beginning March 8.

Calendar items should be mailed to the Courier-Journal Calendar Desk, 67 Chestnut St., Rochester, N.Y. 14604. Deadline is Wednesday noon, one week ahead of the publication date.

Life, Liberty and Law

Nancy Murphy

This is a pluralistic world. Or is it?

If pluralism means a system or a society which recognizes more than one basic principle (and that's what Mr. Webster says it means) our education system falls short; not to mention the news media and the entertainment industries. Today's history, biology and health textbooks teach blatantly that the world is overpopulated, that we are running out of food resources to nourish and sustain the nearly 4 billion who now inhabit the earth and that we must prevent or destroy humanity (especially the "unwanted") if we are to continue our present affluence and if we are to save our own lives. Visual aids, textbooks, teachers and administrators are so sure of these negative theories that they teach them with impunity as though the theories were essentially unchallenged.

Well, I'll challenge them because those who teach them as well as those who allow them to be taught are shortchanging our youth. They are disregarding a significant opportunity to guide youth's inherent genius to challenge, to confront, to question and to seek.

Sharp educators, like my friend Eliot Wigginton who gave birth to the Foxfire era in Rabun Gap, Georgia, seek honest outlets for that remarkable energy so abundant during teen years. Wigginton knew instinctively how devastating

it would be for his high school students to realize at twenty or so that all of their fresh and vibrant dissension had been wasted through shortsighted misdirection on the part of educators. He looked beyond the array of average outlets for those who must "challenge tradition," and instead, channeled energies toward the continuum of the human condition through honest and prudent and useful knowledge, and he taught his students the deep meaning of Christian joy. Yes, a good teacher is a rare and beautiful thing.

The overpopulation theory is just a theory, and a negative one at that. The lack of food resources is a myth. I suggest to our educators and our youth that we challenge them

both. I specifically suggest that our Catholic school systems might enhance their present situation if we rise to meet the rights and responsibilities of a pluralistic society. (It is hardly pluralistic for instance, for a Catholic school to parrot Paul Ehrlich, Issac Asimov, ZPG and Planned Parenthood International).

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