

REFLECTION FOR THURSDAY OF FIRST WEEK OF LENT

Esth 4:17 Matt 7:7-12

Esther was a Jewish maiden married to the Persian King who ruled Israel at that time. The King issued a decree that all Jews were to be put to death. Since Esther was so close to the King, it fell to her to appeal to him to cancel his decree. Everything depended on the success of her appeal. It was a desperate situation to be in.

Before making that appeal, Esther prayed earnestly to God. Her prayer which we find in part in the 1st reading:

‘O God, my King, come to my help, for I am alone and have no helper but you...Remember us now, Lord, in this time of distress.’

Her prayer, though it was one of desperation, it was one of great trust too. It implied courage, trust and great love.

She was praying not for herself, but for her people. Fortunately, her appeal was successful, and the King spared her people.

This is a perfect example of the power of intercessory prayer of a righteous person. We Christians are called to do the same. We are called to pray and intercede for others. Like Esther our prayers are powerful. James 5:16 says the fervent prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Many people feel desperate for help from God at some point in life. There are times when we feel all alone. But those who have faith know that they are never alone. They know that God is always with them.

Jesus urges in today’s Gospel reading to have great trust in God. If we, sinful human beings that we are, know how to care for our children, giving them what they need, then how much more will God, whose love far surpasses anything we are capable of, do the same for us. God may not always give us what we want. But he will always give us what we need in a particular situation.

Very often, our own prayer of petition, our own asking, knocking, and seeking of God, comes out of some experience of great distress. Maybe it is true, as is often said, that we pray best when we are in need.

We are to ask for what is good, or, in other terms, we are to ask for what is of God, what God desires for us and our world. That is why the purest form of the prayer of petition is the prayer, ‘Your will be done’. This was the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. His prayer of petition began, ‘let this cup pass from me’, but it concluded, ‘your will be done’. At that point, the prayer of petition becomes the prayer of surrender, and this is surely the deepest form of prayer.

We pray that we may go on confidently asking, to go on joyfully seeking, and to go on hopefully knocking at the door, so that the good things You want to give us may be ours. Amen.

Fr Patrick