

25. February 2021

**“I have no one but you, Lord”**

*Esth 4:17k.17l-m.17r-t*

***Queen Esther also took refuge with the Lord in the mortal peril which had overtaken her. She besought the Lord God of Israel in these words:***

***My Lord, our King, the Only One, come to my help, for I am alone and have no helper but you and am about to take my life in my hands. I have been taught from infancy in the bosom of my family that you, Lord, have chosen Israel out of all the nations and our ancestors out of all before them, to be your heritage for ever; and that you have treated them as you promised. Remember, Lord; reveal yourself in the time of our distress. As for me, give me courage, King of gods and Master of all powers! Put persuasive words into my mouth when I face the lion; change his feeling into hatred for our enemy, so that he may meet his end, and all those like him! As for ourselves, save us by your hand, and come to my help, for I am alone and have no one but you, Lord.***

In order to understand this prayer, we need to know a little about the story behind it.

Esther was a Jewish girl who no longer had parents (*Esth 2:7*) and lived with her uncle Mordechai at the court of the Persian king Ahasuerus (Xerxes I), who came to power in 483 BC. The events described are likely to have taken place in a period from (483-473 BC). When the king was looking for a new wife, since he had dismissed the previous queen, he came across Esther. She received the king's affection from the start - she *“won his favour”* (*2:17*) and so he chose her as queen. She had concealed her Jewish ancestry (*v. 19*).

At the same time, a man named Haman experienced a meteoric rise (*ch. 3*) in the ruler's court. The king exalted him above all princes and everyone had to prostrate themselves before him in homage (*3:1-2*). There was only one who did not: Mordechai, Esther's uncle. As a believing Jew, he refused to worship a man. This, in turn, so infuriated Haman that he induced the king to pass a law providing for the holocaust of all Jews on a day determined by lot (the pur) (*3,8-11*). The text was written and distributed by courier to all 127 provinces (*3:14-15*). This caused great anxiety and consternation among the Jews. The king had signed the law without knowing that Esther was also a Jewess.

Mordechai encouraged Esther to stand up for her people with the king (*ch 4*). He saw it as God's providence that Esther was in a influential position in this particular

situation. He said to her: *“Who knows? Perhaps you have come to the throne for just such a time as this.”* (4:14)

To seek out the king was a life-threatening undertaking, for the queen was never normally allowed to go before the king uncalled. However, Esther was willing to risk her life for her people and asked her people to pray and fast for her. She said to them: *“Go and assemble all the Jews now in Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink day or night for three days. For my part, I and my waiting-women shall keep the same fast, after which I shall go to the king in spite of the law; and if I perish, I perish.”* (4:16)

This is the background to this poignant prayer of the courageous woman!

Indeed, she was alone, as the title of the reflection indicates. Certainly she could count on the prayers and fasting of the Jews. But in the encounter with the king she was alone, knowing full well that she was acting against the strict law of the Persians. But she was inspired by the misfortune that threatened her people. On the advice of her uncle, she took on a responsibility which was also given to her by her special position at court.

Again and again we see this in the Holy Scriptures: People who are prepared to stand up for others and put themselves in mortal danger. In all of them the deed of the Lord on the cross is reflected, who gave his life for the redemption of all mankind.

Esther realises what we all have to learn at the hour of death at the latest, but better much earlier: *“I am alone and have no one but you, Lord.”*

This reality should not be oppressive, even if at first it may take away all possible earthly supports from us. To recognise it is essential, for only then will we awaken to true security in God. It was a courageous step on Esther's part, but at the same time a safe one. What could have happened to her? Even if the king had punished her or even killed her: She would always have been in the hand of God, knowing that she had done the right thing. It is this surrender of her life to God and the boundless trust in him that makes her say: *“If I perish, I perish.”*

It is not against honour to be afraid of death or of a sorrowful path. Our Lord Himself has shown it to us (*cf. Mt 26:36-44*). Esther too was afraid of death (*Esth 5:1b*). But her trust in God and love for her people was stronger and the Lord answered her pleading prayer.

The story ended well for Esther and the Jews (*Ch. 5-8*). The people were saved and Hamas was delivered to justice. It would be worth reading the whole book of Esther in the Bible - it is a truly moving story!

When it comes down to it, we have no one but God. But with that, we have everything! We need to understand this well in times of increasing anti-Christian darkness when the usual supports fall away.

God alone is enough. Everything else is added by the Lord (*cf. Mt 6:33*)!