

Pastor's Pen: Made For Times Such as These

In the Old Testament we have the story of Queen Esther. Esther was a Jewish maiden selected by the Persian King Ashereus to be his queen. Her nationality and faith were unknown to him. As time passed, his prime minister, a man named Haman, convinced the king to completely destroy the Jews in the Persian Empire. Of course, Esther's family told her about this and asked her to intercede. There is a problem in the Persian Kingdom: no one came in to the throne without being asked by the king and to do so carried the death penalty. This included the queen. Esther initially balked, but her step-father said to her, *"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this."* (Esther 4:14)

Challenges arise in every age. I am not one to ascribe to there ever really being a golden age. Every generation has their challenges. We have ours. Having said this, we do live in a particularly difficult time. It is very easy to either accept the status quo and capitulate whatever we need to to go along to get along. We can also wring our hands and hide in victimhood classifications and believe that is enough. It is not. We can wait and brace for impact. All of these are passive. What we need in such troubling times are heroes: people who were made for times such as these.

For those of us old enough, the events of September 11, 2001 still are etched in our minds. It seems every time the anniversary comes around, images of the planes slamming into the World Trade Center are aplenty. Those images never resonated with me. The images that did were not ones that painted us as victims, but as heroes. The images of fire fighters and police personnel running towards the buildings knowing full well that doing so could kill them -- those images resonated with me. Another is the story of the passengers on Flight 93, who rushed the hijackers even though doing so guaranteed their own deaths -- but they did so to keep their plane from being another missile. That story resonates with me. These are men and women who were made for times such as these. Those who capitulate, wait, or merely complain are never those who restore order: it is the heroes that do.

My brothers and sisters, it is heroism that is called for. It is that heroism that led Jesus to the Cross, being the hero who would surrender His life for ours and beat an opponent, the devil, who we could never defeat on our own. As we proceed through the days of Holy Week, we highlight just how heroic Christ the Conqueror and King is. Today, Passion Sunday, we start the meditation of the event leading up to His death and how He rides into it like a king riding onto the battlefield: not afraid to surrender His life for those soldiers under His charge. We see the betrayal of a coward who sells Him out for profit. We see Him establish a new covenant, replacing the sacrifice of bulls for Himself, changing the Bread of Presence present in the inner court of the Temple with a Bread and Wine that become His Body and Blood. We see Him arrested (an event He could have changed in a heartbeat) and embrace His death as the ultimate act of heroic love. Then we see our hero triumph over death in His resurrection. He was exactly what He was called to be for eternity.

Now, my brothers and sisters, we are called to follow in those heroic steps. We follow the heroic footsteps of apostles and missionaries who risk everything to spread the Gospel even if doing so costs them their life. We rise up like the great heroic saints who saw the issues of their day, such as Mother Cabrini or Mother Teresa, who threw all pretense of comfort to the wind in order to address the issues of their time. We rise up like the great reformers such as St Francis of Assisi, St. Theresa of Avila, or St. Ignatius of Loyola, and not simply wringing our hands at problems within the Church, but heroically calling the Church back to its life of heroic love.

Why? Because the same love that drives Jesus to heroically charge towards the Cross is the same love that should drive us heroically to engage at whatever cost. That's hard. Sometimes, we can initially be like St Joseph. When he wishes to send Mary away upon finding out she's pregnant, it is not because he doubts her integrity, but because he doubts his worthiness and ability to accomplish such a heroic task as being the provider and protector of the Word made Flesh and His mother. The angel assures him this is God's will and God will give him all the help he needs to accomplish such a heroic task. St. Joseph embraced the task like the hero he was. He was the man who rose to the task for which he was made. Let us not mistake his humility for fear or disobedience.

So many times, we can look at all that challenges us and be overwhelmed. However, the answer is like the answer to "how does one eat an elephant? One bite at a time." The hero knows that many times the race is more a marathon than a sprint. I think of a scene from the movie, "The Lord of the Rings." The hero Frodo is beaten, dejected, and wonders why he is going through everything he has gone through and must still go through? The temptation to just side with evil is powerful. His good friend, Samwise, rallies his friend with words that come from the heart of a hero, "There is good in this world, and it is worth fighting for." His friend has been with him and suffered every setback, danger, and indignity -- and yet heartedly presses on.

I bring this all up not because of any particular thing going on in our parishes but many of us see what is happening in our societies, communities, and families. We see loved ones suffering in intolerable circumstances. Our media rejoices in the problems with the glee of a pig in a muddy sty. It presents a narrative that you can't solve your issues, you need a Messiah to win. We have a Messiah. A Heroic One. We need to be reminded of that. We need to remember that Jesus will give us the grace to be the heroes of this time in which we are.

There is much I would like to do to push us on like an unconquerable army. I need men and women who will grasp that heart of the hero and follow Christ into whatever battle or breach He leads us into. As we watch closely this Holy Week, let us look at the heart of Jesus as the prototype heart of a hero and boldly go where we must. Let us be the people who rise to the time in which we live.