

Week 8: October 27, 2010
THE 611
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XVII. Ruth and Esther. Although they come to us in two different time periods, we bring these two heroines together as they both exemplify what courage and friendship ought to look like. These two women were raised up from the shadows of very dark times in salvation history: Ruth, before the period of the Kingdom of David, and Esther, during the period of the Exile. These two books maybe short in length, but as is the case with the Word of God, not short in content.

1. Ruth emerges onto the scene during the turbulent time of the judges (recall this is the period that gives us a heightened sense of what the sin cycle looks like). From the chaos arises the most beautiful figure of Ruth. Ruth was a Moabite, which means that she is a descendent of Lot, Abraham's nephew. This means that she worshipped pagan Gods and belonged to a nation that were the antagonist to Israel. Here, we have a very early anticipation of God's sense of universalism. That is to say, God accepting all nations (Kreeft).
 - a. The story is one of ordinary people where Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz are faithful to each other in a time of unfaithfulness. St. Thomas More once said, "The times are never so bad, that a good man cannot live in them." Like any good drama worth telling, the Book of Ruth opens up with a very tragic opening. Famine and death leaves Naomi to grieve the loss of her husband and two sons—Ruth is the widow to one of the two sons (consider St. Rita).
 - i. Where God appears to abandon Ruth, His providence surpasses all expectations (cf. Eph.3:20; 1 Cor.2:9) as he gives to Ruth a Husband and Son. Mindful of the significance of what a name means, the underlining plot of Ruth that keeps the story moving is her unswerving friendship with Naomi and her God Ruth's name comes from the Hebrew word *reuit*, meaning "friend".
 - ii. This friendship reaches its apex in Ruth 1:16 (read). Along with her friendship that leads her out of famine, the reward of Ruth's faithfulness is quickly discovered when you follow her offspring with Boaz in David (great grandmother).
 - iii. Boaz prefigures Christ as he is Ruth's *goel*, meaning "kinsmen-redeemer". Essentially, he buys her back to be his own by rite of the Jewish law.
2. The story of Queen Esther comes to us at the time of the Exile. Queen Esther is a story of a Jewish queen who has been exiled with her people in Persia. The story opens up with the Herod-like King, Haman, getting King Ahasuerus to sign an edict that would terminate all Jews in his land. Given the fact that this law was stamped with finality makes this story all the more remarkable. As the story is shared, Queen Esther intercedes on behalf of the Jewish nation and the Jewish people are saved (Kreeft). (*consider the marian dimension*).
 - a. Alongside Mordecai's (Queen Esther's uncle) counsel of the King, this book is about Esther's courage to face the King and admit to her Jewish identity. She exemplifies the virtue of fortitude.
 - i. Fortitude: "*The moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good*" (CCC 1808). The word is derived from the Latin *fortissimo*, meaning "strong and brave". Along with temperance, the moral virtue deals with how we handle ourselves with others.

- ii. Put simply, no virtue is realized unless there is a struggle and it is fought for. Many have said this virtue that it is the one lacking in a culture that is measured by how convenient we can make everything (technology).
 - iii. Fortitude is closely linked to perseverance, where patience (means “to suffer or to endure”) perfects all things. Often the very thing that we do not want to do the cardinal virtue of fortitude demands that we do it! Martyrdom is the peak of fortitude observed. Fortitude is also measured by readiness to serve and willingness to die for other.
- b. Once again, we see God use unexpected human instruments and human wisdom to achieve God’s plan. We also continue to see this thread of him using the serpentine ways of evil men to achieve, in the end, the greater good (Good Friday) and victory.

XVIII. Job and the nature of suffering. The story of Job has transcended time for all of its beauty, terror, tenderness, and ultimately, mystery. That being said, for all of its wealth of mystery, its main point is quite simple, the problem with evil, suffering, and all the injustices in the world is solved by God. That is to say, God in himself. Within the Book of Job, we find many lessons uncovered by the story as it unfolds.

1. Let us first examine the question of Job and his experience of faith. Job’s faith expects just rewards, but his experience is something entirely different—undeserved suffering. One of the greatest attributes of God’s nature is Truth, that is to say, his absolute trustability (Kreeft).
 - a. Although Job appears to have God figured out, it is in fact, God who has Job figured out. God pushes Job to the brink, and he passes the test. Paul reminds us that God is not going to give anything that we cannot endure (cf. 1 Cor.10:13). Essentially speaking, those times where we think we are being punished, we are in fact being rewarded. Trial and pain bring forth the greatest victories.
2. The next question that is raised with the story of Job is the meaning of life. Consider the question: “Why did you bring me from the womb?” (Job 10:18). A question that has the context of agony.
 - a. The image that can be painted is one of a little child whose father has just let him down.
3. A third question that arises from the pages of this tortuous tale is about identity. Consider the three friends who go to comfort Job; they actually fail to recognize him as he sits on a dung heap covered with soars. This is the Job who shined forth as one of God’s chosen ones solving everyone’s problems. Although it may appear that Job has lost his identity, he is in fact being sculpted into the way in which God wishes to mold him.
4. Another question, and the deepest of all, is the problem of God. God’s purposes, character, mystery, reliability are mysteries revealed throughout the Bible. So the question is not what God is in himself, but who is God to Job. This question ultimately unlocks doors to other questions. Consider Job’s three friends, traditionally; there are four arguments that come from the speeches of these three figures (Kreeft). They are as follows:
 - a. God is all good and all powerful that rules with perfect justice
 - b. Their ethical premise adds that justice means rewarding the good and punishing the evil.

- c. Furthermore, they see happiness as a reward to those who are just and misery and punishment for those who are unjust.
 - d. Because Job is Miserable, they see him as wicked. Ultimately, Job cannot answer their argument.
5. The answer that the Book of Job provides, once again, points to a truth beyond conventional wisdom. First, that God's wealth of goodness is mysterious, and moreover, how we attain God's blessedness is even more mysterious. The overarching lesson from Job is here, that suffering precedes blessedness (Kreeft).
- a. The story of Job propels us to go further. Ultimately to see that the heights of blessedness is attained in the vision of God himself (read Job 13:15). One has to appreciate the deep-seeded sentiment of the faithful Jew that no one can see the face of God and live. Of course, Job's brilliance comes in his conviction to see God's face, which he does (read Job 42:5).
 - b. Strikingly, God does not answer a single one of Job's difficult questions. We must remember, Job is not the anawim of God. In fact, he is quite impatient, yet he is satisfied. Why? Sometimes the best answer is the Answerer. Sometimes the answer can only be found in the presence of God. Instead of words he gets the Word (Kreeft).
 - i. The words of the Lord to St. Thomas Aquinas ring loud and clear here: "You have written well of me Lord; what will you have as you reward?" Thomas responds with: "only yourself Lord."
6. What is the difference between the three friends and Job and how they correspond with God. The three friends speak in a manner that is engaging while Job has this stormy relationship. The distinction: one is about God and one is to God (Kreeft)
- a. The three friends address the God that does not exist: the IT IS. Job addresses the God that exists: the I AM. This anticipates a theology of presence by way of relationship.
 - b. Job's Christology is rich in his own tale as a suffering servant. He suffers not because he is bad, but because he is good. Moreover, we read of Job praying on behalf of his three friends. Ps.22, fittingly, can be put to the lips of Job.