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Commentary of Rabanus Maurus On the Book of Esther

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FOREWORD TO THE EMPRESS JUDITH

The Book of Esther, which the Hebrews count among the Writings, contains in the form of mysteries many of the hidden truths of Christ and of the Church – that is, Esther herself, in a prefiguration of the Church, frees the people from danger; and after Haman – whose name is interpreted as *wickedness* – is killed, she assigns future generations a part in the feast and the festival day. In fact, the translator of the biblical narrative claims that he has copied this book from the documents of the Hebrews, and rendered it straightforwardly and word for word; and yet he did not omit entirely what he found in the Vulgate edition, rather after translating with complete fidelity the Hebrew original he added as an appendix to the end of the book the rest of the passages he found outside it. We have, moreover, explained in an allegorical fashion the material that has been drawn from the Hebrew source; while we have chosen to not to comment upon all the other passages that have been added to it in accordance with the language and the literature of the Greeks, and marked by an obel. But any serious reader can understand well enough the sense of these passages once he has carefully scrutinized the previous ones. And since you, noblest of queens, perceive so well the divine mysteries contained in the interpreted passages, you will no doubt arrive at a proper

understanding of the others. May almighty God, who spurred on the spirit of that queen so that she would rid her people of their troubles, deign to lead you – who labors with the same kind of zeal – toward eternal joy.

CHAPTER I

About King Ahasuerus and his famous feast.

“In the days of Ahasuerus, who ruled from India to Ethiopia over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces; when he was sitting on the throne of his kingdom...” The story of Esther is found not only in the holy books but also in the *Antiquities* of Josephus, though their accounts of these events differ in certain respects. But the latter also raises the question of just who was this Ahasuerus who ruled from India to Ethiopia, over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces; for when Josephus mentions him, he reports that Cyrus was the son of King Xerxes who ruled in Persia after his uncle Darius. He says, therefore, that Cyrus was the one the Greeks called Artaxerxes – surnamed “Longhand” – who held the kingdom for forty years; but I don’t believe that Esther lived in that era because Ezra would never have kept silent about her, given that he writes that it was at that time that Ezra and Menna returned from Babylon, and then narrates their subsequent actions. Eusebius, accordingly, suggests in his *Chronicle* that this Ahasuerus was called Artaxerxes, and that he reigned for forty years after his uncle Darius, who was surnamed “Bastard.”

“The city of Shushan was the beginning of his kingdom.” Susa is the capital of Persia, which according to the chroniclers was founded by the brother of Memnon; and it is called Susa because it borders on the river Susa, which is the location of the royal palace of Cyrus. This was known for its bright and colorful stone, along with its gold columns, its ponds, and its gems; and it also contained a likeness of the heavens inlaid with shining stars, and other things that the human mind finds difficult to comprehend. And it was there, we are told, that the king in question would stage for his subject peoples a grand feast that featured impressive accouterments and a wealth of riches. Hence it continues:

“So in the third year of his rule, he held a grand feast for his officials and young men, the famous heroes of Persia and Media and the chiefs of the provinces in his presence,

so that he could show off the wealth of the glory of his kingdom, the grandeur and ostentation of his power for a long time, namely 180 days. And when the days of the feast came to an end, he invited all the people who were found in Susa, from the greatest to the least; and he ordered a seven-day feast prepared in the entryway of the garden and the grove that the king had planted and cultivated by hand. And from every spot were hanging tents the color of the sky, and fine linen and blue, held up with ropes of flax and purple which were inserted into circles of ivory and supported by marble columns. And those who were invited were drinking from gold goblets, and food was brought to them in various kinds of vessels. Also excellent wine was served in abundance, as befitted the royal magnificence. And yet he did not force to drink anyone who did not wish to do so; but as the king had decreed, he sat each of his officials at tables so that each one could take whatever he liked." Though these preparations for so rich a feast seem intended to portray in concrete terms the parade of wealth and the abundance of delights possessed by a powerful king, it is actually a very sanctified allegory which symbolizes the magnitude of spiritual riches, and the excellence of the necessities of life, provided by the most powerful of kings, namely the Lord Christ, which he – in accord with his method of dispensation – has generously distributed to each of his faithful ones. For this king of great wealth, who was convinced by the entreaties of his faithful wife to do away with the imminent destruction of the Jews which wicked men were plotting, prefigures no one more than our Redeemer who is accosted every day by the prayers of the Church who is his dearest wife, and frees his chosen ones from the hands of their enemies, and subjects their adversaries to the punishment they deserve. And that Esther prefigures the Church, no one can doubt; nor may she be described as the bride of anyone but Christ. That is why no one should reject this interpretation merely because this actual king was faithless, as though this would mean he could never be a figure of the just king; for we do not say that anyone's treacheries or transgressions are the sum of his behavior, whether he is trustworthy or even faithless: "He did not sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2). "For how can light associate with darkness; or what can Christ have in common with Belial (2 Corinthians 6)?" Rather, the good actions and just judgments of any individual should be associated with no less an authority than the one from whom comes every good, about whom it is written: "He will judge the world in fairness, and the peoples in his truth" (Psalm 9). For the transgressions and sins of the faithful do not provide the most accurate representation of their character, as do the errors and wicked actions of the gentiles; and the reason we are saying this is because certain of our teachers have used David's behavior toward Uriah and his wife as a prefiguration of Christ and the Church. Why would anyone want to suggest that Moses' doubts at the "waters of

dissension," Aaron's deception about manufacturing the calf, Solomon's lust, Ezekiel's arrogance, Peter's denial, and Saul's blasphemy are fitting prefigurations of our Redeemer? And yet no one can properly deny that the good actions and the correct doctrines of those men offered a great deal of evidence on his behalf. No one, therefore, ought to take us to task for comparing, by some sort of analogy, the righteous works and the just judgments of a great king to the king and judge of all the ages; since whatever is good belongs to him, and every sin flees his presence. But if anyone should feel that what we are saying is inappropriate, let him read the prophet Isaiah who compared Cyrus, the king of Persia and a gentile, to our Redeemer when he said in the person of the Lord: "I will give you hidden treasures and the secrets of hidden things so that you may know that I am the Lord, since I the God of Israel call on your name for the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen one; and I have summoned you in your name, I have made you like me though you have not acknowledged me. I am the Lord and there is none greater; aside from me there is no God. I have strengthened you, though you have not acknowledged me" (Isaiah 45). Let him read as well the short works of the Fathers, who said that the deeds – or rather, the misdeeds – of the shameful kings Saul and Jeconiah were symbolic prefigurations of the holy actions of our Redeemer – that is, they interpret the death of Saul, who was anointed king but was quite rightly killed for his crimes, in reference to the death of Christ the innocent king; and they explain the fact that Jeconiah was exiled from Judah to Babylonia – which he deserved because of his sins – as a prefiguration of the grace of that same Redeemer of ours, which was why he deigned to wander through the world for sake of saving the nations once he had left the Jews behind for their faithlessness. They also reported that the actions of Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar should be understood as prefigurations of the enemies of the Church; for example: Pharaoh commands the male infants of the people of God to be killed in the river and the females spared, because the Devil wishes to extinguish the sturdy aspects of our behavior, and to nourish the feckless and weak ones. In the same way, Nebuchadnezzar ordered all the peoples subject to him to bow down and worship his statue to the sounds of orchestras and musicians; and the Devil uses the sweetness of earthly pomp to try and steer the human race away from proper intent, and to pervert the hearts of the deceived into indulging their desire, which is "the worship of images." If, therefore, certain actions – namely the just punishment of shameful men – prefigured not only wicked acts but good ones, could not the good actions or words of good men, which are contained in the writings of the prophets, also have prefigured the good deeds of those who came after them? After all, the power of the sacred narrative is (as someone has said) that it tells us about what happened at one time or another so that it may spell out what is going to come; it approves of the actor

so that it may reprove him in the guise of an allegory, and condemns what has happened to persuade us allegorically of what is going to happen. Let us also consider the short works of St. Augustine, who said that the seven husbands of a single wife who died without children, with whom the Sadducees were testing the Lord because they denied the idea of resurrection, were likewise a sure prefiguration of the sacrament of the Church. In fact, he taught that the wife, and her barrenness and death, as well as the deaths of her husbands, prefigured noteworthy events even though the Lord himself did not tell this story, and neither did any of the evangelists who were writing in his person; instead they recorded the unspeakable words that wicked men had thrown in the Lord's face, on account of the Lord's very sanctified response. So when the faithful reader finds these sentiments and others like them among the statements of the sacred Fathers, he should not give the credit to us if we choose to include assertions of a similar character in our own brief works.

"So in the third year of his rule, King Ahasuerus held a grand feast for all his officials and young men, the famous heroes of Persia and Media, and the chiefs of the provinces in his presence, so that he could show off the wealth of the glory of his kingdom." For our Redeemer – whom Ahasuerus represented in both his title and his rank – is interpreted as "my entry" or "my court", because in the third era of that age the eternal ruler of man in the Father and the Holy Spirit opened wide to the human race the sacrament of his incarnation; and he has opened up for us the entryway to life and served to his faithful ones the most ample of spiritual banquets. The first era, then, was before the Law, the second was under the Law, and the third was under grace, namely when he fulfilled his preaching in the Gospels and prepared for all the nations an opulent meal of his body and blood. That is to say, the Lord himself was spiritually commending to us, in as a mystery, the excellence of this feast through the Gospel parable in which he described the king who threw a wedding for his son, and the great meal prepared by a man. "So the great king held a feast for seven days, in the entryway of the garden and the grove that the king had planted and cultivated by hand," because for the entire period of that life which transpires in multiples of the number seven, our Redeemer satisfies his chosen ones with the pasturage of the divine word and the feasts of the virtues, in the Church of this world where each of the faithful readies himself – with correct faith and good works – to enter Paradise and the celestial kingdom. Hence they will become accustomed in every respect to the delights and the pleasures of the heavenly kingdom where fruit-bearing trees are planted, that is, where holy men and those who are famous for their good deeds show – through the divine gift that has been lavished on them – the beauty of holy conduct and proper doctrine. Hanging there "from every spot are tents the color of the sky, and fine linen and blue," because it is

there that the spiritual ornament of study, and the splendor of celestial wisdom, flash with the brilliance of the virtues whose proper purpose is to instruct us in those things. For that matter, the color of linen mimics (as some claim) the appearance of gold, and has deservedly been compared to the sheen of divine wisdom which excels above all in the cultivation and the practice of righteousness. "And these tents were stretched with ropes of flax and purple, and were supported by marble columns." For flax signifies the mortification of the flesh, purple the blood of martyrdom, ivory the chastity of the body, and marble columns the solidity of the sacred teachers. It therefore makes sense that, as we are told, the tents of various colors were held up with ropes of flax and purple by ivory circles on marble columns, because the beauty of the holy Church ought to shine in the contemplation of wisdom – or rather in the perfection of the virtues – through the restraint and chastity of bodies, i.e. with the honor of martyrdom among the teachers of the sacred Gospels; and it ought, through both the word and the example of these men, to reach the notice of many people so that those who have been taught, encouraged and comforted by them may be able to reach, as they should, the court of the celestial empire. There were also "gold and silver couches spread about a floor inlaid with emerald and Parian marble, which he decorated with a marvelous variety of pictures," because the humility of the saints, which is decorated with diverse kinds of the various virtues, provides the peace of inner contemplation to the chosen of God when they consider the divine word and investigate the true wisdom. It is there that the sweetness of knowing and loving God is lavished generously upon those who seek righteously in the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is about this couch that the bride speaks in the Song of Songs: "Our couch is bright with flowers;" in other words, when any of the saints make use of the tranquility of his times and depart from times of tribulation, it is then above all that they are free to make use of the sacred couches, fasting, prayer and all the other fruits of the spirit. They may then raise themselves up high in the contemplation of ethereal matters to gaze in all directions upon the glory of the divine majesty, since they have been given a respite from less essential concerns. The emerald is, after all, so called because it is so green; and Parian is the whitest kind of marble; and it is fitting that, as we are told, the floor where the couches were placed was set with these two stones, since it is through the whiteness, i.e. the chastity of the body, and the greenness of the good sense which is always verdant in the grace of God, that the foundations of humility are solidly laid where the reward of eternal peace is prepared for all those who deserve it. Hence it is written: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, because theirs is the kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5). And "He who has well humbled himself will be properly raised up" (Matthew 23). That is why the same Truth says to the disciples elsewhere in the Gospels: "Learn from me because I am gentle and humble of heart, and

you will find rest for your souls; for my yoke is smooth, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11). “And those who were invited to the royal feast drank from golden goblets.” Those who drink from golden goblets are those who draw divine wisdom from the precious sayings of the sacred Gospels; and those who are served foods in different kinds of vessels are those who – by reading the Law and the prophets, and the apostles and the Gospels – are known to accept the manifold meals of spiritual doctrine on which are fed the souls brought up for eternal life. And as befits the magnificence of a king, wine is also served to the guests in exceptional abundance, since the gift of celestial grace is generously granted to each and every one of the faithful in accordance with the dispensation of divine mercy and the grant of the Holy Spirit. This is because, in Paul’s judgment: “the charity of God is spread throughout our hearts by the Holy Spirit which was given to us (Romans 5)”; and “To each one is given a manifestation of the Spirit for their use. Indeed, one person is able through the Spirit to speak the words of wisdom, while another, through the same Spirit, speaks the words of knowledge; to another is given faith in that same Spirit; to another, the grace of healing in that one Spirit; to another, the working of miracles; to another, prophecy; to another, the power to discern spirits; to another, the varieties of languages; to another, the interpretation of speech” (1 Corinthians 12). And what we said a moment ago – i.e. that he did not force to drink anyone who did not wish to do so, but as the king had decreed he sat each of his officials at tables so that each could take whatever he liked – symbolizes the freedom of grace in which no one is forced against his will to accept a spiritual gift, rather the willing participation of each individual is sought in accordance with that statement of the Lord where he says: “Whoever can accept this, let him accept it” (Matthew 19). And in the same spirit: “If you wish to enter into life, then keep the commandments” (*ibid.*). And again: “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven; and come, follow me” (*ibid.*). For at the festive and sacred feast of the holy Church, our king seats his teachers at the table of the Holy Scriptures so that they might dispense to each of the faithful the doctrines that are suited to him, and adapt to each man’s character the preaching of the word so that each one might take from it whatever he perceives as feasible and useful to him. Of course, the words of a teacher must be crafted with such skill that even though the faults of his hearers differ from one another, they should be suited to each individual and yet not contradict themselves; in this way he may maneuver in a single pass between the moderate passions, while at the same time cutting out – in the manner of a double-edged sword – the tumors of carnal thoughts. He may, accordingly, preach humility to the arrogant without making the timid more afraid; he may lavish authority upon the timid without loosening up on the arrogant; he may preach to the indolent and the

sluggish attention to good works, without giving the impulsive the license to act without restraint; he may place limits upon the impulsive without making the indolent secure in their laziness; he may dampen the wrath of the impatient without encouraging carelessness among the easygoing and the gentle; he may enflame the feckless to take action without adding fuel to the irritable; he may fill the miserly with the desire to give generously, without having to preach tightfistedness to the prodigal; he may praise marriage to the promiscuous, without enticing the continent back to excess; he may praise bodily virginity to the continent, without causing married couples to look down on the fruitfulness of the flesh. He will preach the good in such a way that the bad will not also be commanded alongside it; he will praise the highest good without despising the final one; he will foster the final one so that for as long as it is believed sufficient, no one will ever turn from it toward the highest. So the faithful and wise slave who has been appointed the manager by his master, and gives his fellow slaves their share of the wheat on time, is praised by his master's words; and he is promised that he will be put in charge of all his goods. Hence it is necessary that one who ministers with the cup of the word should possess the means of discretion, so that he may obtain from his ministry praise and reward rather than condemnation and torment.

CHAPTER II

About Vashti, who was summoned to the king but refused to come, because of which she was stripped of her royal rank and rejected by her husband.

“Vashti the queen also held a feast for the women in the palace where King Ahasuerus liked to stay.” Queen Vashti must symbolize the Jewish people, which at the time seemed to have ruled like a queen since it was found to stand apart from all the other nations in its worship of a single God. So she held a feast for the women where the king would liked to stay; that is, in Jerusalem itself – the site of the Temple of God and the Holy of Holies – it demonstrated its observance of the Law in worship or rather by meditating on the Holy Scriptures, through which it supplied to its members the refreshment of spiritual knowledge by granting them the awareness of their power from Heaven.

“So on the seventh day when the king was very festive, and after he had drunk too much and grown heated from the wine, he ordered Mehuman, and Biztha, and Harbona, and Bigtha, and Abigtha, and Zethar, and Carcas, the seven eunuchs who ministered in his presence, to bring in Queen Vashti before the king once the diadem had been placed upon her head, so that he could show off her beauty to all the peoples and officials; for she was very beautiful. But she refused, and disdained to come at the king’s command.” The seventh day of the feast symbolizes the beauty of the time when the Lord incarnate clarified in his abundant grace all the mysteries of the Law and the prophets upon which the pious minds of devout men had been feeding till then. It is about this completion that Paul writes to the Galatians when he says: “And when the time was completed, God sent his own son made from a woman so that he might redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might receive the adoption given to children. Because you are the children of God, God has sent the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying: ‘Abba! Father (Galatians 4)!’” And it is well said that after drinking too much he had grown heated from the wine, because he poured into his disciples, through the arrival of the Paraclete, abundant grace through the gift of the Holy Spirit. We read about this wine in the Acts of the Apostles that when, in the Cenacle of Zion, the Holy Spirit settled upon one hundred and twenty believers and the Jews thought that they were full of new wine, Peter answered them with: “Brothers, despite what you think these men are sober, since it is the third hour of the day. But this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘And it will be in the last days, says the Lord, that I will pour out from my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy; and your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. And I will indeed pour out from my spirit in those days upon my servants and my maids, and they will prophesy; and I will show marvels in the heavens above, and signs on the earth below (Acts 2).’” When, during the allegorical wedding in the Gospel, the chief steward tastes the sweetness of the wine, he says to the groom: “Every man serves the good wine first, and once they have become drunk he serves the inferior stuff. But you have saved the good wine till now.” So the king in his happiness ordered the seven eunuchs who ministered in his presence to bring in Queen Vashti before the king once the diadem had been placed upon her head, so that he could show off her beauty to all the peoples. And in the same way, our Redeemer Christ (i.e. the Lord) directed the order of the aforementioned saints, which was full of the grace of the sevenfold Holy Spirit, to assemble the Jewish people at a spiritual feast, so that its beauty and nobility – which it had as a privilege of its ancestors, and because of its knowledge of the Law and the prophets and its cultivation of righteousness (for which it was better known than the other nations before the coming of the Lord) – would be known to the peoples of the

entire world. But she disdained to come, not only showing her contempt for the emissaries but even rejecting the authority of the supreme king. Of course, the Lord himself referred to this in the Gospel parables, when he explained that it was the mercy of the righteous father toward his wasteful but penitent son, whom he took into his home, that led him to sacrifice a calf and hold a feast which his older son refused to attend even though his father had summoned him from town. And elsewhere we read about the men who – occupied with their pursuit of other things – did not want to come to the wedding which the king had prepared for his son, or to the great meal which, it is written, a certain man had prepared and to which he had invited many people. It was, we are told, because of this that the head of the household – who had every right to feel indignant – turned away even men of the highest rank and substituted others in their place. Hence the older son, and the ancient people of the Synagogue who are represented in the person of Queen Vashti, refused to leave their dwelling, i.e. to be parted from the letter of the Law, but were rather content to live by their own judgment which they would exercise for the satisfaction of their earthly desires. They were exiled far from the homeland of the Holy Spirit and the counsel of the Father, forever brittle and hard, full of rancor and indignation; they are the one who says: “I have bought a field, and I need to go out and see it; I ask you to excuse me” (Luke 14). The one who purchases five yoke of oxen is weighed down by the burden of the Law while enjoying the pleasures of our earthly senses; the one who has gotten married and cannot come to the wedding, and having been made flesh can never be one with the spirit – the character of this man is much like that of the workers in the parable in which they are sent to the vineyard at the first, the third, the sixth, and the ninth hour, i.e. they were hired at different times. So they are indignant that the workers hired at the eleventh hour are being paid the same amount as they are. But let us hear what Scripture has to say about the stubbornness of Vashti, that most foolish of queens:

“So the king was angered, and enflamed by his excessive rage he questioned his wise men, who were always at his side according to royal custom; and he used to do whatever they advised him, since they knew the laws and the rules of the ancestors. And in the first and second place were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven leaders of Persia and Media who would see his face and whose authority was normally second only to his own; and it was to their judgment that Queen Vashti was subject when she did not want to obey the command of King Ahasuerus given to her through the eunuchs. And as the king and his officials listened to him, Memucan said: ‘Vashti has injured not only the king, but all the officials and peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. For her words will go out to all the women, so that they will despise their husbands and say: “King Ahasuerus ordered

Queen Vashti to come to him, and she did not want to.” And with this example, all the wives of the officials of Persia and Media will hold cheap the authority of their husbands; so that the king’s indignation is just. And if it pleases you, let an edict go forth from your face, and let it be written according to the law of Persia and Media – which it is forbidden to ignore – that Vashti may no longer come into the king’s presence, but that her reign should be given to another who is better than her.” Now, when Vashti shows her arrogance, King Ahasuerus seeks the advice of the seven wise men who are always at his side according to royal custom, and commands that their judgment about her should be carried out; and this can only mean that our Savior – through his learned men who are filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, and always take care to stand in his presence with upright faith and good works – bases his verdict upon the stubbornness of the Jewish people who are guilty of punishing and condemning him. He ruled, in other words, that they should be driven from the seat of the king, i.e. from their relationship with God for which they were ordained and chosen; and that another, better people – namely, the Church of the nations – should take its place in genuine faith and full devotion. So the Lord promised by the Law and the prophets shows in the Gospel itself that he was destined, at the behest of the Father, to summon Judea when he says: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 15)”; and likewise: “It is not good to take the bread of children and toss it to the dogs” (*ibid.*). But when the gentile woman continues to petition him, the Lord himself rightly praises her great faith; and elsewhere the faith of the centurion is shown preference over the faith of the Jews, when he says: “Amen, I tell you, many will come from the East and the West and will recline with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven; while the children of this kingdom will be cast into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8). Likewise, in another passage the Truth herself says to Jerusalem: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you kill your prophets and you stone those who were sent to you; how often have I wanted to gather your children, like the hen gathers her chicks beneath her wings, but you did not want me to. See, your house will be left to you desolate” (Luke 13). Moreover, after his resurrection he commanded his disciples as follows about summoning the nations: “Go and teach all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to keep everything I have ordered you to do. And see, I myself am with you for all the days until the very end of the age” (Matthew 28). It is also fitting that he was publishing his decision about Vashti through Memucan, who is mentioned last in the series of seven wise men, because he symbolizes the persona of the apostle Paul who was the last to be called as an apostle, and through whom the Jews are properly reproached for their faithlessness. For he says about himself: “But I am the

least of the apostles” (1 Corinthians 15). And elsewhere he says: “To me, the least among the saints, has been given this grace, so that I might evangelize Christ among the nations” (2 Corinthians 3). So while he had been preaching the word of God together with Barnabas in the Synagogue of the Jews, and the Jews – who were full of zeal – were speaking out blasphemously against what Paul was saying, he said to them firmly: “It was proper that the word of God should first be spoken to you; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves undeserving of eternal life, see we are turning to the nations. For so the Lord has commanded us: ‘I placed you as a light for the nations, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’ And hearing this, the nations rejoiced, and they glorified the word of the Lord, and whoever had been preordained for eternal life believed” (Acts 13).

CHAPTER III

That virgin girls were gathered from the various provinces to the domain of King Ahasuerus, among whom was Esther the daughter of the brother of Mordecai the Jew, whom he, as her uncle, was raising with conscientious care.

“After these things had happened and the king's indignation had cooled, he remembered Vashti and what she had done, or what she had suffered. And the king's young men and his ministers said: “Let us find for the king virgin girls, and let them be brought to the city of Shushan and placed in the women's house under the hand of Hegai the eunuch, who is in charge of and guards the king's women; and let them be given the cosmetic treatments of women, and the other things necessary for their use. And whichever one among them all may please the eyes of the king shall rule in place of Vashti.” When, therefore, Judea had been repulsed from its relationship with the king, various nations – and the various inhabitants of particular nations from the various parts of the world – were brought in to receive a share in the royal grandeur through the holy preachers, who were ministers of the words of the Gospel. And they were placed under the hand of Hegai, meaning *quick* or *customary*, who was in charge of the king's women; that is, under the care of the shepherds and rulers of the Church to whom the governance of the souls of the faithful was committed, so that they might be able to offer them, in word and by example, whatever they needed for the cultivation of righteousness. And so whatever souls pleased the eyes of the inner breast in proper

faith and pure conscience would be brought, pure and holy, to the bed of the eternal king in place of the stubborn and shameless Vashti who had been cast out.

“There was a Jewish man in the city of Shushan by the name of Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish of the line of Jemin, who was brought there from Jerusalem at the time when Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had brought Jeconiah the king of Judah; he was the guardian of his brother's daughter Hadassah, who was also called Esther. She had lost both her parents, and was very beautiful and had a lovely face. And when her mother and father died, Mordecai adopted her as his daughter. And when the king's order had been publicized, and many beautiful virgins were brought to Shushan in accordance with his command and were handed over to Hegai the eunuch, Esther was also handed over along with the other girls to do her service among the women. And she pleased him, and found favor in his sight; and he ordered the eunuch to hasten her cosmetic treatments, and to give her his own share of food, and seven beautiful girls from the king's house; and to adorn and beautify both her and her attendants.” Now, what can Esther – whose name means *hidden*, and who was also called Hadassah, i.e. *mercy* – signify if not the Church of the nations, which pleases God in the recesses of its heart because its faith is pure, and it finds before the eyes of God more mercy and grace than the Synagogue of the Jews which the prophet Hosea rightly calls “No-mercy” on account of its wickedness. So the spiritual Mordecai adopts her as his daughter, because she had lost both her parents; and what can Mordecai signify if not the teachers of the nations, and especially the blessed apostle Paul who was also, we are told, from the line of Jemin, i.e. from the tribe of Benjamin? He too was entrusted with the Church of the nations after the call of God transformed him from a persecutor into an apostle; and after the deaths of her father and her mother – that is, the errors and superstitions of the gentiles – he made her in a sense his own when, through the grace of baptism and the word of the Gospels, he sired anew a daughter for the all-powerful Father for eternal salvation. Hence he said to them: “Though you might have many masters, you do not have many fathers; for I sired you in Christ through the Gospel” (1 Corinthians 4). She was, therefore, been taken into captivity at one time by Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, when – because of the Devil – she was taken from natural law and the worship of one God to the confusion of idolatry. Yet God's righteousness never abandoned her, and in fact called her back to the path of truth by means of his preachers, who looked after her with great care and brought her up in complete righteousness, justice and truth. For her, Hegai the eunuch – i.e. the chaste order of pastors – prepared the cosmetics of women, that is, healthful doctrine and examples of good works; and he gave her his own share of food, which was actually the knowledge of Scripture and an upright character. He also

arranged for her seven beautiful girls as attendants, in that he adopted – for the sake of giving her a very beneficial apprenticeship – more of the faithful who were reborn through the grace of the sevenfold Holy Spirit and likewise took up good works. In other words, she would therefore be found suitable in every way for the couch of the eternal king, adorned as she was with a flourishing faith and the glow from every kind of virtue.

“She did not want to disclose her people and her country; for Mordecai had ordered her to say nothing about this matter.” That is, the Church of the nations, which was instructed in the precepts of the sacred teachers, does not want to betray the place of her country and people because now that she has been cleansed through baptism of all the pollution born of sin and the filth of idolatry, she can no longer endure in any form the shame of her original impiety. Moreover, the Lord is also commanding her through his prophet, when he says: “Listen daughter, and see, and lend your ear, and forget your people and your father’s home, because the king has desired your beauty, because he is the Lord your God” (Psalms 45). So it follows that Scripture demonstrates through the figure of Mordecai the cleverness of the leaders, when it says:

“He would stroll every day in front of the forecourt of the house where the chosen virgins were serving, expressing his concern for Esther’s welfare and wanting to know what was happening to her.” Because every day the sacred teachers take care to keep watch, venturing out to teach the Gospel so that they might examine the faith and the works of the people entrusted to them, to see if they are following with attentive concern the rule of proper faith through which we obtain eternal salvation; or if they are diligent about worshipping God and doing good works, which is how we may win the reward of the heavenly kingdom in the life to come. For those whose hearts burn incessantly with the heat of proper faith and the fire of divine love cannot be free of this concern for even an hour. Hence when the teacher of the nations glories in his labors and in the persecutions which he suffered for Christ, he adds as follows: “And in addition to any secondary concerns, I am faced every day with my concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is offended without my being disturbed?” (2 Corinthians 11) And to the Romans: “God, whom I serve in my spirit in the Gospel of his Son, is my witness that I remember you in my prayers always, and without interruption” (1 Romans).

CHAPTER IV

When it is Esther's turn to be brought in to the king, he loves her above all other women and appoints her queen.

“And when the time had come for each of the girls to enter in order the presence of the king, a period of twelve months had gone by while everything that had to do with the refinement of women was completed; that is, for six months they were anointed with oil of myrrh, and for another six they used certain pigments and scents.” Now, why is it that the girls who were to be brought into the king's bedchamber were prepared for twelve months with oil and scent, i.e. for six months they were anointed with oil of myrrh (which is known to have a pleasant odor) and for another six they used various pigments and scents? It must be that all the souls who are invited to receive the gift of holy baptism and to enter the bed of the true Groom, i.e. Christ the king, are thoroughly imbued by oil of myrrh – i.e. by the light of faith and the salve of love – with the scents of the virtues, so that they will deserve to be worthy of his company. For what are the holy preachers doing when they instruct their catechumens in the truth of the faith, if not teaching them to adorn that faith with good works so that with fasting, prayer and charity, and with other works of virtue, they may quickly wash away the original filth of the old man and clothe themselves in the elegance of the new one. We read, after all, in the Acts of the Apostles that the centurion Cornelius had first pleased God with prayer and charity, and then when Peter arrived he received the purification of baptism and the sanctification of the Holy Spirit. Hence it adds:

“And when they went in to the king, they would receive whatever they requested for their adornment; and once they were made up as they liked, they would cross over from the dining room of the women to the king's bedchamber.” For any soul that strives to hurry to the bed of the heavenly Groom receives from its teachers the adornment that is appropriate to it, and with which it shows itself more devoted to the understanding of the faith and the knowledge of virtue, so that – by the intact faith of the holy Trinity and full confession – it may go forth from among the postulants to receive the sole baptism and anointment with the holy oil, when it is genuinely united with the heavenly Groom.

What then follows – “She would enter in the evening and leave in the morning, and was then brought to the second building” – and so on, proves in an allegorical way that after our vices have subsided, the glow of our virtues (which will not shine properly anywhere but in the unity of the holy Church) ought to rise. And yet one who has

sequestered himself from it because he has some foul odor of error or vice is quite rightly kept from being brought to the second building where the king's concubines were waiting, because a decline in robust faith deserves not an advance in but a restoration of respect; and he will no longer have such an authorization to return to our king until he has been visited once again by celestial grace, and restored through his calling to his original dignity.

“When, moreover, in the course of time the day arrived in turn when Esther the daughter of Abichail the brother of Mordecai, whom he had adopted as his daughter, was supposed to go in to the king, she did not ask for the treatments given to women; rather, Hegai the eunuch, the guardian of the virgins, gave her whatever adornment he thought she should have. For she was very shapely, and in her incredible beauty she appeared gracious and lovely to all who saw her.” It says “in the course of time,” i.e. once the five ages of the world – during which the posterity of the Fathers was gaining ground, and the institution of the Law was flourishing among the Jews – had come to an end, and a sixth age was at hand when, with the arrival of the Redeemer, a multitude from among the nations would be brought together through the Gospel. For it was then that Esther in the allegorical sense, i.e. the Church, was being brought from among the nations to Christ the king through the apostles' preaching, and by means of the belief of robust faith and the sacrament of baptism; she was shapely, and in the incredible beauty of her virtues she appeared gracious and lovely to all who saw her. The apostle Paul mentions this period when he writes to the Galatians, as follows: “After the fullness of time had come, God sent his own Son born from a woman, made under the Law so that he might redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might receive the adoption given to children” (Galatians 4). And to the Ephesians: “God, who is rich in mercy, revived us together with Christ by whose grace you were saved, because of the great charity with which he loved us even though we were dead through our sins; and he revived us with him, and had us sit with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus to show in the ages to come the abundant riches of his grace in his goodness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2). Hence we should also bear in mind the crucial moment when Esther was brought to the king's bedchamber:

“So she was brought to the bedchamber of King Ahasuerus in the tenth month, which is called Tevet, in the seventh year of his reign; and the king loved her more than all the women, and placed the diadem of kingship on her head, and had her rule in place of Vashti.” For Tevet is that month in the Hebrew calendar which corresponds to the Greek Eudymos and the Latin Januarius, when the Lord incarnate was circumcised on the eighth day and was adored even as a tiny infant by the Magi, who were brought

there by a star that led the way, and honored as God, man and king with the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh that were offered to him. This was also the month when he was heralded and baptized by John. So in the seventh year of Ahasuerus, Esther went up to the king's bed; and the Church was brought to and joined with the king Christ, in whom she remains without change by the grace of the sevenfold Spirit. "Whom he loved more than all the women;" and she had before him grace and mercy above all women, that is, above all the nations of the world. "He placed on her head the diadem of kingship," when he summoned her as his consort in kingship; "and he had her rule in place of Vashti," i.e. the Synagogue of the Jews which lost its place of honor when it spurned and crucified our king. That is, the prophet is looking at the excellence of this queen when he says to Christ the king: "The queen stood at your right hand in golden robes, cloaked in colorful clothing" (Psalms 45). And right after that, he speaks to her as follows: "Listen daughter, and see, and lend your ear, and forget your people and your father's home, because the king has desired your beauty. He is the Lord your God, and the daughters of Tyre will adore him; with gifts all the wealthy among the people will seek your face" (*ibid.*).

"And he ordered that a greatly magnificent feast be prepared for all his officials and slaves in honor of his union and marriage with Esther, and gave a respite to all the provinces, and showered them with gifts as befits the generosity of a ruler." Now, what can "prepare a greatly magnificent feast for all his officials and slaves in honor of his marriage with Esther" mean, if not that everyone throughout the world, from the greatest to the least, celebrates with the greatest joy the spiritual union of Christ and the Church? After all, at this feast it is not meals of the flesh that the celebrants have the honor to consume, but the spiritual dishes of wisdom and virtue. It is there that all of the faithful receive – for the sake of restoring their salvation – the sanctified mysteries of the body and blood of the Lord; and there that the fodder of eternal life is stored. Our king gives a respite to all the provinces, and bestows gifts of many kinds, when he frees those who believe in him from the burden of sin, and repays them with spiritual gifts. That is why he himself says in the Gospel: "Come to me all of you who labor and are burdened, and I will restore you. Take my yoke upon yourselves, and learn from me because I am mild and humble of heart, and you will find rest in your souls" (Matthew 11). The prophet as well says about this: "When he went up on high he led captivity away captive; he gave gifts to men" (Psalms 68). That is why the apostle adds to this: "And he made some of them apostles, others prophets, still others evangelists, and others pastors and teachers for finishing the training of the saints for the work of ministry, for building the body of Christ until we all arrive at the unity of faith and the

knowledge of the Son of God, at the complete man, at the measure of the age at which Christ reaches his fullness" (Ephesians 4).

"And when virgins were sought for a second time and gathered together, Mordecai was staying at the king's door; and Esther had still not betrayed her country and her people in keeping with the order of Mordecai, since Esther obeyed whatever he commanded. And she did everything as she had been accustomed to do when he was raising her as a small girl." Virgins are being sought for the king a second time and gathered together, because it was not enough for our Lord Jesus Christ to associate himself exclusively with the Jewish members of the early Church; rather he also acquired through his preachers copious numbers of the faithful from among the nations so that a single catholic Church would arise from both peoples, namely his most noble bride who has no blemishes or wrinkles. Hence he himself says in the Gospels: "And I have other sheep which are not from this fold, and it is right that I should lead them; and they will listen to my voice, and there will be one fold and one shepherd" (John 10). "Mordecai was staying at the king's door," because the holy teachers who are persistently committed to teaching the Gospel call together the nations to the entryway of faith and the sacrament of baptism; and our Esther had still not betrayed her country and her people in keeping with the order of Mordecai the prefiguration because in keeping with the doctrine of faith, the Church of the saints never does anything out of arrogance but rather obeys – humbly and in pure conscience – everything commanded her by the aforementioned evangelists. And it is about her that the prophet says: "All the glory of the king's daughter from within" (Psalms 45). And the apostle says: "She is our glory, the testimony of our conscience" (2 Corinthians 1).

CHAPTER V

About the fact that two eunuchs who wanted to kill the king were turned in by Mordecai and punished as they deserved.

"So while Mordecai was staying at the king's door, Bigthan and Teresh – two of the king's eunuchs, who were doorkeepers and presided over the first rank in the palace – became angry and decided to rise up against the king and kill him. Mordecai found out about this and immediately told Queen Esther, and she told king in the name of

Mordecai who had brought the matter to her attention.” Now, what can these two eunuchs, who were doorkeepers of the royal house and presided over the first rank in the palace, symbolize if not the scribes and the Pharisees of the Jews about whom it is said that though they had the key to knowledge, they did not enter themselves and would not allow anyone else to enter. These men decided to rise up against the king and kill him because they constantly envied the teachings and virtues of the Savior and so decided to plot against him; and together with the administrators of Roman rule they were trying to kill him in some way. Hence we read in the Gospel that “the Pharisees went out and hatched a plot to catch him with his words; and they sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians, saying ‘Master, we know that you are truthful and you teach the way of God in truth; and that you do not concern yourself with anyone because you show no regard for a man’s status. Tell us, then, what you think – should one pay taxes to Caesar, or not (Matthew 22)?’” And elsewhere it is written that “the chief priests and the Pharisees assembled a council, and they said ‘what shall we do? Because this man does many wonders, if we let him go like this everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and do away with our place and our nation’” (John 11). Hence a bit after that, he adds: “So from that day forth they determined to kill him” (*ibid.*). The prophet Isaiah is alluding to these two characters when he mentions the two houses in which the Savior incarnate became a stone to trip against and a rock to stumble over, a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem on which many of them will stumble and fall, and be bruised, and ensnared, and caught. So our Mordecai, who knew about the wickedness of these eunuchs, turned them into the king through Esther, because the order of preachers shows the faithful – who are the limbs of Christ – how to be on guard against the deceit and the depravity of these men. These two eunuchs might also represent the character of heretics and schismatics who, because they carry in their hearts the poison of deception and wickedness, attack the truth by assiduously constructing evil schemes for removing it from the hearts of believers, and somehow killing within them Christ who is the life of the faithful. But the sacred teachers, who illuminate the sinfulness of these men, expose to the light the darkness of their errors by showing how the innocent are rescued from the death of the soul because God has pointed them out; how the guilty are punished with just vengeance; and how those who deserve it are repaid with the appropriate reward. Then it adds:

“And it was investigated, and discovered, and both men were hung on a gibbet; and the king commanded that it be written in the record book that he should be repaid somehow for saving his life; and it was set down in the accounts, and recorded in the chronicles before the king.” The “record books” are, then, the volumes of the two

Testaments which set down the rewards that await the righteous in return for their good deeds, and the punishments that await the wicked for their sins. Hence it is written in the Gospel: “The son of man is going to come in the glory of his Father, and will then repay each one according to his works” (Matthew 16). And likewise, “The wicked will come to eternal punishment, while the just come to eternal reward” (Matthew 25). Hence Paul as well writes to the Romans as follows: “For the wrath of God is unleashed upon all the wickedness and injustice of men, who repress in their injustice the truth of God who repays each according to his works; and those who seek glory, honor, and purity by patiently doing good deeds will receive eternal life, while those who trust in wickedness, because they are contentious and will not acquiesce to the truth, will receive wrath and indignation. There will be trouble and distress for every soul of an evildoer” (Romans 1 and 2). Ezekiel as well speaks about this: “The justice of the just man will be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked man will be upon him. When a soul has sinned, it will die” (Ezekiel 18). The Psalmist also refers to this in the same terms: “The eyes of the Lord are upon the just, and his ears attend to their prayers; the face of the Lord is upon those who do evil, that he may wipe their memory from the earth” (Psalms 33).

CHAPTER VI

Haman, who nursed a hatred for the Jewish race because he wanted Mordecai to pay homage, complained about them to the king who ordered them all to be killed on a single day.

“After that, King Ahasuerus raised up Haman the son of Hamedatha, who was of the line of Agag, and placed his seat above all of his officials. And all the king’s slaves who lived within the doors of the palace were kneeling and paying homage to Haman, for so their emperor had commanded them; only Mordecai would not kneel or pay homage to him.” Now, what could the arrogant Haman symbolize if not the haughtiness of the powerful of this world, who exploit the benefactions conferred on them in the name of godly piety even as they disdain to treat their neighbors – who share their lot in nature – as partners in their good fortune? That is why they wickedly attempt to direct toward themselves the honor and reverence which should properly be paid to God alone; and they persecute with hatred, pursue with torments, and even try to have killed anyone who refuses to do or agree to this. But the supreme judge, “who looks

down upon the humble but recognizes the haughty from far away; who knows the deceiver and he who is deceived, turns the grief caused by the wicked back upon their heads, and their wickedness comes down on the tops of their heads. The unjust are caught in their own traps; the just man is freed from his constraints; and the wicked man is put in his place" (Psalms 138 and 7).

It may also be that this Haman the Agagite, who according to Josephus was descended from the line of Amalek, prefigures the bloody people of the Jews who killed their prophets and were not afraid to kill even the Lord of the prophets and his apostles. It was when they lost the nobility of their race because of their disbelief and hardness of heart that Isaiah called them the princes of Sodom and the people of Gomorrah; and Ezekiel tells them: "Your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite" (Ezekiel 16). Hence these proclaimers of Christ regard them as enemies of the law of God. So they rush to lay their hands not only on Mordecai, that is, on the preachers of the Gospel, but also on the entire catholic people, and to wipe them out from this life; and yet the death they were scheming to inflict upon the innocent in this world they are forced to endure endlessly within their souls because their own actions demand it, and a just judge is paying them back.

"And Haman said to King Ahasuerus: 'There is a people, scattered throughout the provinces and separate from one another; they make use of new kinds of laws and ceremonies, and they spurn the king's rulings besides. And you know full well that it would do your rule no good to give them the license to grow insolent. If it pleases you, issue the decree that it should perish, and I will weigh out ten thousand talents for the treasurers of your stores.' So the king took from his hand the ring which he used, and gave it to Haman the son of Hamedatha of the line of Agag, the enemy of the Jews; and he said to him: 'The silver which you promised is yours; and as for the people, do as you like.'" So Haman promised ten thousand talents of silver to the king, and asked for the death of the Jews; and so too the Jewish people, who were dedicated to the fleshly observance of the rites of the Law in the belief that they were pleasing God in this way, planned the death of the true witnesses to Christ who were performing their spiritual service to God in accordance with the teachings of the Gospels. And just as Haman, when he sent his letters, took care to enforce them with the king's seal because this would make it easier for him to carry out his wishes, the faithlessness of the Jews wrongly exploited – as evidence for their heresy – the books of divine law in which the seal of the supreme king is impressed, that is, the grace of the Holy Spirit is made manifest. This they did in their effort to denounce the conversion of the nations to a

fellowship of faith, and to condemn the Gospel of Christ as something contrary to God's precepts.

Nor is it merely a straightforward fact that it was the twelfth month of the year, which is called Adar, that was set aside by lot for the murder of Israel; it signifies rather that the grace of Christ, which has been entrusted to the faithful in the fullness of time, is going to experience a harsh persecution in this world in the last days, carried out upon the faithful. This is what the teacher of the nations is also writing about when he says to Timothy: "And let it be known that in the last days we will face dangerous times; and men will be lovers of themselves, greedy, arrogant, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, wicked, emotionless, implacable, slanderers, unrestrained, harsh, without kindness, treacherous, reckless, bombastic, loving their pleasures more than they do God; and though they will have the appearance of righteousness, they will deny its power." Hence the Lord also says in the Gospel: "This evangel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will arrive" (Matthew 24). And a bit after that: "Then there will be great tribulation, of a sort there has not been since the beginning of the world till now; but it will not happen unless those days have been cut short" (*ibid.*).

"And the decree was immediately issued in Shushan; and the king and Haman were attending the feast while all the Jews in the city were crying." This is what the Savior preached to his disciples in the Gospel: "Amen, amen I say to you that you will cry and weep, while the world rejoices; and though you will be sad, your sadness will turn to joy" (John 16). So let us see what Scripture goes on to tell us about Mordecai.

CHAPTER VII

When Mordecai learned about this, he put on sackcloth and sent word to Esther that she should beg the king to spare the lives of the Jews.

"When Mordecai had heard these things he tore his clothing, and put on sackcloth, and sprinkled ashes on his head and cried out loudly in the boulevard in the middle of the city, showing the bitterness of his soul. And wailing in this way he made his way to the doors of the palace; for it was not allowed to enter the king's court while wearing sackcloth etc." When Mordecai hears that the slaughter of the Jews has been fixed by

imperial decree, he dresses himself in somber clothing and approaches the doors of the palace with a bitter soul and a wailing voice; and when the leaders of the Church hear about the persecution which the princes of the earth desire to inflict upon the blameless slaves of Christ, they long to pour out their troubles – with fasting and charity, with vigils and prayer, with tears and the devotion of the heart – to the hidden recesses of Heaven, i.e. in the sight of the supreme judge. So in light of the honor and the prayers of the true queen, i.e. the holy Church which even now wanders the earth for some of the time, and rules with the Lord in Heaven for the rest, they deserve to be heard by the king of all ages. If, moreover, one were to ask how it might befit a just king to inflict torments on the innocent, he should know that the source of this is not some desire to do harm but the intention of the highest providence; for the divine wisdom – which conquers every sort of wickedness and reaches powerfully from one end to the other, and disposes everything with ease – does whatever it wishes in Heaven and on earth, on the sea and in all the depths. It is, in other words, with just judgment that his faithful servants are delivered into the hands of the persecutors, whether to expiate their sins or to correct their behavior or even to add to their merits or multiply their rewards, since – as the prophet testifies – “the Lord is just in all his ways, and holy in all his acts; he is close to all who call upon him” (Psalms 145). In truth, he will do the will of those who fear him, and will listen to their prayers and bring them salvation; for the Lord did not deliver Job into Satan’s hands to destroy him because he asked him to, but so that with Job’s help he could defeat his most wicked enemy and so acquire for himself the palm of victory, and leave to that enemy the just punishment for his wickedness. The apostle Paul was subjected to a corporal goad, namely the angel of Satan, who pummeled him so that his virtue would be perfected in a state of weakness. We should also be careful not to pass over in silence the statement that Mordecai could not enter the royal court because he had put on sackcloth, but instead got as far as the doors of the palace; because no one who has been polluted by the life of this world may enter the court of the heavenly realm, rather each of us should, before the last day of his life, knock on the entrance of the kingdom by chastising his body and repenting in his heart for as long as he is here. And this way, he will be fortunate to enter the paradise of the Lord after he has passed into death.

“So Esther sent this message to Mordecai: “Go and gather all the Jews you find in Shushan, and pray for me. Do not eat and do not drink for three days and three nights. And I will likewise fast together with my maids; and then I will go in to the king without being summoned, though that is against the law.” Mordecai prays with the Jews on behalf of Queen Esther, and the queen likewise prays for Mordecai and the Jews, because a teacher ought to offer prayers to the Lord on behalf of his students, and

students on behalf of their teachers, that the entire community of the faithful – i.e. the limbs along with the whole body – may be kept whole through the kindness of Heaven. This explains why, when Paul writes to the Romans, he tells them that he constantly mentions them in his prayers; and he also makes these same Romans swear on the Lord Jesus Christ, and on the charity of the Holy Spirit, that they would help him in their prayers and pray for him to the Lord that he might be freed from the faithless who were in Judea, and that his ministry – which he was bringing to Jerusalem – might be acceptable to the saints. So too is it written in the Acts of the Apostles that when Peter was thrown in jail, the Church prayed constantly to the Lord on his behalf; and he himself likewise asks in his letter that the grace of God, and the peace of the Church, may be multiplied and fulfilled in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER VIII

Esther went in to the king, and invited him and Haman to a feast.

“And on the third day Esther dressed in royal garments, and stood in the courtyard of the king’s house which was inside opposite the king’s basilica; while he was sitting on his throne in the audience-hall of the palace, opposite the entrance of the house. And when he saw Queen Esther standing there she was pleasing to his eyes, and he extended to her the golden staff he was holding in his hand. And she approached him, and kissed the tip of his staff; and the king said to her: ‘What do you wish, Queen Esther, what is your request? Even if you ask for half of the kingdom, it will be given to you.’ But she answered: ‘I beg you to come to me today, and Haman with you, to a feast.’” What can it mean that on the third day Esther dressed in royal garments, if not that in the third age of the world – i.e. after the incarnation, passion and resurrection of Christ – the Church of the nations dressed herself in faith, hope and charity, and in the beauty of all the virtues, to receive the sacraments of baptism through the confession of the holy Trinity so that she would then be worthy of the king’s company, since she was burning incessantly with a special love for him? She stands in the courtyard of the king’s house which was inside, opposite the king’s basilica, i.e. in the righteous works of this life which looks toward future compensation in Heaven, where the king himself sits on his celestial throne and assents to the prayers of those who piously cry out to him. He extends to this queen the staff he holds in his hand when he shows her the

power of his rule, or rather the cross of his passion through which he has acquired for himself power in Heaven, on earth, and below the earth; so that “in his name every creature – celestial, terrestrial and infernal – shall bend his knee.” In fact, she kisses this staff lovingly, that is, she reveres it with total devotion. And the king himself pledges that he will agree to her request, just as he says in the Gospel: “Ask and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you” (Matthew 7). And likewise: “Seek and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.” For complete joy is given to the holy Church solely in the sense that it partakes in the kingdom of Heaven, where the fortunate queen will rule forever with Christ the king. And yet once she is allowed to choose her request, she invites him to the feast she has prepared for him; though this can best be understood as that complete and perfect devotion to her faith upon which the observer and arbiter of all the ages nourishes himself within. Of course, the Church invites to this refreshment, i.e. to this communion of vigorous faith, not only her friends but even her enemies and persecutors, namely pagans, Jews and heretics, so that – leaving behind the isolation of complete error – they may rejoice in the common good in the single home of catholic belief.

“And the king said right away: ‘Call Haman so that he may obey the will of Esther;’ so the king and Haman came to the feast which the queen had prepared for them.” Notice that the will of the queen when she invites them is at one with the order issued by the king; but woe to anyone who approaches with evil intent the table of the Lord, who has a breast marred by hatred and an impure conscience and so does not fear to enter the feast of the Lord even though he is unworthy. And even when he has often been invited and has come, he will not linger amid the joyousness of the feasters because his faults force him to leave; but when the king comes in to see him lying there without having dressed in wedding clothes, he chastises him for his arrogance and orders his men to tie his hands and feet and throw him into the outer darkness, where he is rightly forced to suffer the harm he was wickedly planning to inflict on the innocent; as Solomon tells us: “The wicked are caught in their own traps.” So after the king once again gives Esther the chance to make a request, she responds as follows: “If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to give me what I ask and fulfill my request, may the king and Haman come to the feast which I have prepared for them, and tomorrow I will surrender my will to the king.” The fact that she puts off her request should be attributed not to the vice of laziness, but to the virtue of patience; it signifies, in other words, that in the future rewards will be given to the righteous, but punishment to the sinner. For *tomorrow* means here a future time, as it does in the Gospel passage “Do not concern yourselves about tomorrow.” And in Genesis, Jacob says to Laban: “Tomorrow my justice will appear.” In Exodus as well, where the

commandment to eat the paschal lamb is given, it adds: "And nothing of it will remain till the morning." When, moreover, the day of future judgment arrives, and the entire human race- i.e. both the righteous and the sinners – is stood in the presence of the supreme Judge, the intent with which a person has lived in this world will be revealed; and there the righteous are invited by a verdict of the judge who sits before them to partake in the kingdom of their heavenly homeland, and the sinners are expelled to be punished, together with the Devil, with the torments of Hell.

CHAPTER IX

About the fact that when King Ahasuerus had spent a sleepless night, he ordered brought to him the histories and chronicles of earlier times; and while these were being read to him they came to the place where Mordecai turned in the eunuchs who plotted against him. So the king summoned Haman and commanded him to adorn Mordecai with the king's robes and diadem; and that this same Haman should place him on the king's horse and proclaim him a friend of the king. Then Haman returned to his house in sorrow.

"And the king spent that night awake, and ordered the histories and chronicles of earlier times to be brought to him. And when these were being read in his presence, they came to the place where it was written how Mordecai had revealed the treachery of the eunuchs Bigthan and Teresh, who wanted to kill King Ahasuerus. And when the king had heard this, he said: 'What sort of honor and reward has Mordecai received for this loyalty?' And his slaves and ministers said to him: 'He has gotten no reward at all.' Then the king said: 'Who is that in the courtyard?' So Haman, of course, entered the inner court of the king's house to suggest to the king that he order Mordecai nailed to the gibbet which he had prepared for him. And the young men answered: 'Haman is standing in the courtyard;' and the king said 'Let him come in.' And when he came in, he said to him: 'What should be done for a man whom the king wishes to honor?' So Haman, considering this in his heart and concluding that he wanted to honor no one but himself, answered: 'The man whom the king wishes to honor should be dressed in the king's garments, and placed on a horse which the king saddles, and the royal diadem should be placed upon his head; and the first of the king's officials and lords should lead his horse, and walk down the boulevard of the city crying and proclaiming 'This is how anyone the king wants to honor will be honored.' And the king said to him:

‘Hurry and take the robes and the horse, and do as you have said to Mordecai the Jew who is sitting before the doors of the palace. Take care not to leave out any of the things you have said.’” What can the fact that the king spent a sleepless night mean but that which is written in the Psalm: “See, the one who guards Israel will not sleep or slumber” (Psalms 121). They read before him the histories and chronicles of earlier times in which are mentioned the loyalty and the good deeds of Mordecai, because the king of the saints and the prince of the kings of the earth – who remains the same within himself – comes to know with a single glance the course of all the ages and the actions of every individual; and nothing ever escapes his notice, rather everything lies open before him in his sight. Jeremiah tells us about this: “For it is he who has strengthened all things, and Israel is the staff of his inheritance; the Lord of hosts is his name” (Jeremiah 10). Hence the apostle also says: “For in Christ Jesus there is no ‘is’ and ‘was’, but in him there is always ‘is’.” And likewise: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, and for all time” (Hebrews 13).

So Mordecai’s actions are mentioned before this king, because the good deeds of the holy teachers never fade from his memory; rather it is as it is written: “The righteous will be in eternal memory, he will have no fear of bad tidings” (Psalms 112).

It is ordered that Mordecai put on the king’s garments, and be placed upon a horse which the king saddles, and receive the royal diadem upon his head; and that the first of the king’s officials and lords should lead his horse, and walk down the boulevard of the city crying “This is how anyone the king wants to honor will be honored.” After all, the preachers of the sacred Gospel and the leaders of the Church, who glisten with their practice of all the virtues and the beauty of wisdom and – because they are the limbs of the supreme king – are nobly honored with the diadem of royal rank, are ordered to mount the king’s horse, i.e. to take charge of and govern the people of the faithful in whose hearts the king of Heaven himself presides continuously. The Lord himself is told about these horses by the prophet Habakkuk: “Going up you shall mount your horses, and your horsemanship is salvation” (Habakkuk 3).

It is to Mordecai that Haman, the spiritual enemy of the people of God, offers – if unwillingly – the appropriate obeisance, since the persecutors of the holy Church are often forced with the assent of Heaven to preach with accurate testimony the praises of the Church, even though they do so in a spirit of disdain; because once the truth has been revealed, the guilty cannot conceal what is obvious by hiding it away.

“Mordecai went back to the door of the palace and Haman hurried to his house, mournful and bareheaded; and he told Zeresh his wife, and his friends, everything that

had happened to him. And to this the wise men he had in his house, and his wife, answered: 'If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is from the seed of the Jews, then you cannot resist him but you will fall in his sight.'" This is the change in the right hand of the Most High, when someone who was only recently boasting that he had power over others, and was more arrogant than anyone, suddenly becomes more wretched than anyone else and weaker than all of them. It is the magnitude of this phenomenon that Mary, the mother of the Lord, has in mind when she says in her song in the Gospels: "He has made power in his arm, and scattered the arrogant with the thought of his heart. He has dislodged the powerful from their seats, and raised up the humble. He has sated the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty-handed" (Luke 1). We are told about this in Isaiah: "Lebanon will be turned into Carmel, and Carmel will be regarded as a forest" (Isaiah 29).

Here we see how the stubbornness of the Synagogue of the Jews was crushed, and the humility of the Church of the nations exalted; how the persecutors of the Christian faith, who once tore apart the flock of Christ like savage lions, have now been destroyed and reduced to nothing; and how those who proclaim Christ throughout the world have been raised up in a state of vigorous faith and exalted through the power of the virtues. The head has been turned into the tail and the tail into the head, because "Everyone who exalts himself will be brought low; and everyone who humbles himself will be exalted."

CHAPTER X

On the second day of the feast, the queen pleaded on behalf of her people and Haman was hanged on the tree which he had prepared for Mordecai.

"While they were still speaking, the king's eunuchs came in and made him proceed quickly to the feast which the queen had prepared. So the king entered with Haman to drink with the queen. And on the second day as well, the king said to her, after he had grown heated from the wine: 'What is your request, Esther, that I might give it to you, and what do you wish to be done? Even if you ask for half my kingdom, you will receive it.' And she answered him: 'If I have found favor in your eyes, O king, and if it pleases you, give me my soul for which I ask, and my people for whom I plead. For I

and my people have been handed over to be crushed, to be killed and to perish. And at least if we were sold as servants and maids it would be a tolerable evil, and I would sigh but keep silent; but now our enemy is one whose cruelty overflows onto the king.' And King Ahasuerus answered her, and said: "Who is he, and by whose authority would he dare to do this?" Esther said: 'Our enemy, and our worst foe, is Haman;' and when he heard this, he was struck dumb on the spot and no longer could bear the faces of the king and the queen." Now, notice that Haman is now attending the second day just as he had come before when he was summoned; and yet once Esther lays out her request, he is condemned and goes off to his punishment. This explains the fact that in one place in the Gospels is mentioned a lunch made by a person, and elsewhere a dinner; since the lunch symbolizes the present Church, and the dinner the eternal and final feast. Hence once the sinners have been removed, only the good may rejoice in the sight of their creator.

Because Haman – who was of course the spiritual enemy of the people of God – was not wearing the garment of charity which would have made him worthy of the king's feast, he realized that the king was angry; and when the king rushed into the garden – that is, when he invited his chosen ones to the delights of paradise – he tried to plead with the queen for his own safety but in vain, since he could not find an opportune moment for this. For once the penalty of vengeance is imminent, it is too late to look for a means of salvation.

So too in the Gospel parable, the foolish virgins ask for oil to refill their lamps when the groom is on his way, but do not receive it. So after the Groom has entered the wedding with the wise virgins, and the door has been closed, the others remain locked out and must look for a point of entry; but there is no way they can be worthy of this, since they no longer find the opportunity for absolution which they had earlier failed to seek out by doing the appropriate deeds.

One may no longer deserve there what he asks from the Lord, if he did not listen here to what he was ordered to do; once he has lost the chance to do the appropriate penance, in vain does he come with his prayers before the door of the kingdom. This is, in fact, the reason why the Lord says through Solomon: "I called and you refused; I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention; you despised all my counsel, and you ignored my reproaches. I too will laugh at your destruction, and I will mock you when that which you fear comes to pass; when sudden disaster overwhelms you, and destruction assails you like a storm. Then they will call on me but I will not listen; they will arise in the morning but will not find me" (Proverbs 1).

“And when the king went back to the banquet hall, he found that Haman had sunk down to the couch on which Esther was lying, and he said: ‘He wants to conquer even the queen while I am present in my own house.’ The king’s statement had not yet escaped his mouth, and they immediately covered his face.” That is, Haman’s attempt to beseech Queen Esther was regarded by King Ahasuerus as a ruse, because when the day of judgment arrives the petitions of the wicked are seen not as prayer but as provocation. Hence it is written in the Psalm: “When he is judged let him leave condemned, and let his prayer become sin” (Psalms 109). For it is then that the oppression with which they were crushing the humble is thrown back in their faces, because the time of recompense is at hand; for then those who have been condemned for their sins are covered in shame, as it is written: “The confusion of their faces will cover them,” when they are dragged off to the depths of Hell to be given a reward that suits their actions. Hence it also adds:

“And Harbona, one of the eunuchs who were attending the needs of the king, said: ‘Look, the tree which he had prepared for Mordecai who spoke for the king is standing in the house of Haman, fifty cubits high.’ To which the king replied: ‘Hang him upon it.’ So Haman was hanged on the gibbet which he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king’s wrath was placated.” It is written in Proverbs: “He who digs a pit will fall into it; and when one starts a stone rolling it will roll back upon him” (Proverbs 26). So too Haman was forced to suffer the cross he had prepared for Mordecai.

We might, however, ask what it means that, as we have read, the cross itself was made fifty cubits high. For the Law had previously been given to the people on the fiftieth day after a lamb was sacrificed on Mount Sinai; and given that we said before that Haman signified the Jews themselves when they were rioting against Christ – who had been promised to them in the Law – and persecuting his Church, the Law itself, which had been given to them to safeguard their lives, became the cause of their deaths because with it they had snuffed out the name of Christ and tried mightily to kill those who professed him. In other words, those who wanted by means of the Law to oppress the guiltless unjustly received through it the verdict of a just judgment, about which we are told by Paul: “Whoever has sinned in the Law will be judged through the Law” (Romans 2).

Moreover, Harbona the eunuch, who handed over the actual cross that had been made, signifies the teachers of the Law who brought to light – by reading the Law itself – the deceit of the Jews and everything which they did contrary to the precepts of God. Hence because Moses foresaw in the spirit the rebels and apostates who would one day come to be, he predicted in his song in Deuteronomy everything that was going to

happen to sinners. So too the Savior says to the Jews themselves in the Gospel: “Do not think that I am going to indict you before the Father – it is Moses, in whom you hope, who accuses you; for if you believed in Moses you would perhaps believe in me as well, for it is about me that he wrote. But if you do not believe what he wrote, then how will you believe my words (John 5)?”

CHAPTER XI

That Mordecai is appointed in Haman's place and, at the suggestion of the queen, letters are sent to ensure the safety of the Jews.

“On that day, King Ahasuerus gave to Queen Esther the house of Haman the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai went in before the face of the king,” etc. When King Ahasuerus gives Queen Esther the house of Haman the enemy of the Jews, this must refer to the fact that after the people spurned the arrival of the incarnate intermediary between God and man and refused to accept his evangel, the true king and our Lord put at the disposal of the holy Church all the dignity and honor which in the past they had gotten from their knowledge of the Law and the prophets and from their practice of righteous faith, so that the Church would possess spiritual wealth and become the most respected guardian of all the virtues. Hence it is written in Proverbs: “The wealth of the sinner is guarded by the righteous” (Proverbs 13). And in the Gospel, the Lord says to the Jews themselves: “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation that produces its fruits” (Matthew 21). This is also the reason for what Solomon says: “He who is good receives favor from the Lord” (Proverbs 12).

We are next told about Mordecai that he went in before the face of the king, meaning that because the Church praises and proclaims the dedication of its leaders, these sacred teachers discover – in exchange for the effort they have exerted in nurturing the faithful – abundant grace in the sight of the creator of all things. We might also apply this principle to the characterization of all the persecutors of the Church more generally, because whatever the latter produced in their eagerness to acquire wisdom or useful disciplines; or sought out by investigating the respectability of the virtues; or whatever sorts of punishments they devised to torment the martyrs, it was all subverted by the faithful so as to magnify the honor and the glory of Christ. Nor did the wicked

possessors of these things retain any of the good rewards that they earned for their labors, but everything was transferred to the righteous to consummate their perfection. And what follows this, where the king took the ring he had gotten from Haman and gave it to Mordecai, is an allegorical expression of the fact that the seal of faith, which the faithless Jews and all the persecutors of the name of Christ did not want to accept when it was offered to them through the preaching of the Gospel, was transferred to the nations by the apostles of Christ for the sake of their salvation. So Esther holds onto the house of Haman the enemy of the Jews, just as the Church of Christ possesses the world which was once the enemy of Christianity. And Mordecai goes in before the face of the king because the souls of the saints are taken every day from their homes in this life to contemplate the visage of the supreme Judge; there is no limit to the measure of their happiness – each day they experience ever more glory in the joy of eternal exultation.

“And Esther appointed Mordecai over her house.” So Esther appointed Mordecai over her house, because it serves the beneficial intentions of the holy Church that great numbers of the faithful might be placed under the government of the aforementioned saints to be subjected – in humility and obedience – to the authority of their chosen magistrates.

“So not satisfied with this, she fell at the feet of the king and cried, and pleaded with him to command that the wickedness of Haman the Agagite, and the terrible schemes which he had devised against the Jews, should be nullified. But he, in accordance with the custom, held out in his hand the golden scepter which was known to be a sign of mercy; and she rose to her feet, stood before him and said: ‘If it pleases the king, and if I have found favor in his eyes, and my pleadings do not seem unwelcome to him; then I beg that the earlier letters of Haman the plotter and enemy of the Jews, in which he had ordered them to be destroyed in all the king’s provinces, should be corrected by new ones. For how could I bear the death and the murder of my people?’ And King Ahasuerus answered Queen Esther, and Mordecai the Jew: ‘I have granted to Esther the house of Haman, and ordered him nailed to a cross because he dared to lay a hand on the Jews; so write to the Jews whatever you like in the name of the king, and seal the letters with my ring.’” So when Esther falls at the feet of the king and beseeches him for the sake of her people, this must refer to the fact that every day the holy Church humbly petitions the Lord Almighty – through the faith and mysteries of the incarnate, only-born Son of God – to free her children so that through his grace, the arrogance of the enemy might be crushed and the innocence of the faithful be freed from their hands. The supreme king holds out his golden scepter toward the queen as she pleads with him, because he is lavishing on her the mercy of his righteousness. She asks that the

earlier letters of the wicked Haman be replaced with new instructions, because it is the fervent wish of the new queen that the followers of every error in doctrine, and all the hostile machinations with which the ancient enemy tried through its agents to exterminate the people of God, should be rejected and destroyed by the thoroughly salutary writings of the Gospels. The letters themselves are written in the name of the king and then sealed with his ring, because the teaching of the Gospels – which are preached throughout the world in the name of Christ – are declared everywhere to be confirmed by the seal of the Holy Spirit, since the preachers themselves, who are filled with its gift, seem to everyone to be undefeatable in their unflagging strength and to remain ever glorious and triumphant over their enemies.

“And it was the time of the third month, which is called Sivan, on the twenty-third day of that month, that letters were written as Mordecai instructed to the Jews and to the leaders and the governors, and to the judges who were in charge of the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia; to province and province, to people and people, according to their scripts and their languages, and to the Jews however they could read and understand them. And these letters, which were sent in the name of the king, were sealed with his ring and sent by couriers who rode through all the provinces and preceded the earlier letters with their new instructions.” The month of Sivan, which comes third after Nisan in the Hebrew calendar, is the same one the Greeks call Thessaroi and the Romans Junius. On the twenty-third day of that month new letters were dictated by Mordecai in order to refute the earlier letters of Haman. The significance of this is obvious – the teaching of the Gospel was framed by the writers of the New Testament, under the direction of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that it would fully encompass the faith in the holy Trinity, and the absolute perfection of the entire Decalogue would be proven in the two commandments of charity. And by means of the couriers – i.e. the sacred preachers – the Scripture itself is directed toward the entire world, which is symbolized by the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces that made up the realm of Ahasuerus, since the number ten when multiplied by twelve makes one hundred and twenty; and if we were to add another seven to this, it would allow us to complete the entire sum.

In the same way, the true custodianship of the Decalogue within the apostolic tradition was imparted to all parts of the world through the sacred teachers; whereas by the grace of the sevenfold Spirit it was spread through the hearts of the faithful. It is likewise of mystical significance that these letters which were sent in the name of the king and were sealed with his ring were, we are told, written according to the scripts and the languages of each and every nation, so that each nation might be able to read

and to understand; that is, the teaching of the Gospels was ordained in such a way that its first teachers – who had been taught through the grace of the Holy Spirit – spoke first in the words of all the languages, and then the word of faith was seeded by their ministry through all parts of the world. Hence we read in the Acts of the Apostles that in the Cenacle of Zion, the Paraclete of the Spirit came over the one hundred and twenty believers in the form of a fire and enabled them to declare in the tongues of all the nations the marvels of God, so that those who gathered to listen to them would all be struck dumb by this miracle.

“So the king ordered them to assemble the Jews in every city, and to command them to gather together to fight for their lives and to kill all their enemies, together with their wives and children and all their houses. And throughout the provinces a single day was set aside for their vengeance, namely the thirteenth day of the twelfth month of Adar. And the point of the letter was that among all the lands and peoples that were subject to the authority of King Ahasuerus, it should be made known that the Jews were ready to exact vengeance from their enemies.” So when this earthly king orders his couriers to gather the Jews in each place, and to command them to assemble so that they might fight for their lives and kill all their enemies together with their wives and children and all their houses, this can only mean that our king, who rules over all of Heaven and earth, is – through his preachers – ordering the true Jews and their adherents throughout the nations to assemble as a union of fellowship and peace; and to fight for the salvation of their souls; and to condemn all their enemies both visible and invisible, i.e. the false Jews who are the synagogue of Satan and the incorrigible pagans and heretics, as well as the impure spirits with all their impieties and perverse notions. Nor should they permit any remnant of these to survive, or even their wives and children, i.e. they should wipe out completely the carnal desires and the works of sinners together with their houses, namely with their worldly ambitions; or allow to remain any offshoot of these things that could pose a threat to them. So it is that in the Law, the Lord commanded the Israelites to kill and to wipe out those nations in the Promised Land that were antagonistic to them; so too he afterward commanded them to destroy the Amalekites until they were all slaughtered, because he wanted to deprive them of any occasion for misbehavior. This is what the prophet is thinking of when he says in the Psalms: “In the mornings I was killing all the sinners of the land, to wipe out from the city of the Lord all the evildoers” (Psalms 101).

Furthermore, the time at which this slaughter of enemies was ordered to take place accords very well with the mystery of this spiritual slaughter, since the twelfth Hebrew month, which is Adar, can only symbolize the last age of our world when this spiritual

war is being waged above all by the soldiers of Christ. And in the same way, the thirteenth day symbolizes the faith in the holy Trinity through the observing the commands of God, which is the basis upon which all our adversaries are effectively subdued.

Moreover, what follows next – “And the king’s edict was published in Shushan” – means that the domain of the heavenly king rules over and governs the entire world: “everything has been placed under his jurisdiction, and there is no one who can resist his will” (Esther 13); and our mundane ambitions are laid low by his power. So it makes sense that according to the text the king’s edict was also published in Shushan, since “Shushan” means *riding* or *conveying*. In the end, the arrogance of the world is bested by the power of God; which is why the Savior says to his disciples in the Gospel: “in the world, you will face repression; but take heart, for I have conquered the world” (John 16).

CHAPTER XII

On the glory of Mordecai, and how the Jews avenged themselves on their enemies; and that the ten sons of Haman were hanged from the gibbet.

“So Mordecai left the palace and the sight of the king resplendent in his royal garments, namely in clothing of blue and bronze, and wearing a golden crown upon his head, and wrapped in a silken and purple cloak; and the entire city exulted and rejoiced.” It is to the great credit of our sacred teachers that with their teaching and encouragement the faithful are able to conquer, through the power of the supreme king, the savagery of a most wicked enemy; and their reward for this awaits them in the heavenly kingdom of eternal blessing and perpetual brightness, which seem to be prefigured by the color blue and the flash of gold. Moreover, in the celestial citadel the martyrs of Christ, along with those who are going to rule together with Christ the king, are repaid with the dignity given to kings by that most righteous of source of recompense, in exchange for shedding their blood. The terms “purple” and “silken” offer us a prefiguration of this fact; and every gathering of saints will be happy and rejoice no less over this in the celestial Jerusalem. This is described in what follows:

“So for the Jews, a new light was seen to arise; and joy, and honor, and celebration. Among every people, city and province, and wherever the king’s orders reached, there was a wonderful exultation, banquets, and feasting, and a holiday; and so much so that many members of other nations and beliefs adopted their religion and their rites. For a great terror of the Jewish people had fallen upon them all.” Many, therefore, among the gentiles and enemies of the Church left behind their idolatry and their gentile superstitions, and were converted to the Christian faith by the power, wisdom and perseverance of the holy martyrs, and through the virtue of Christ that shines through them; which should be perfectly obvious to anyone who reads about the sufferings of the saints and the triumphs of the martyrs. And since that time, the numbers of the faithful have been growing every day by the mercy of God, and the precincts of the Church have been replenished. This is mentioned by the Psalmist: “Let all the land fear the Lord; let everyone be moved by him, and all who inhabit the world” (Psalms 33). And likewise: “The righteous will rejoice in the Lord and will hope in him; and all the upright in heart will be praised” (Psalms 64). And the apostle says: “In the name of Jesus every creature – celestial, terrestrial and infernal – shall bend his knee, and every tongue shall proclaim that the Lord Jesus is in the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2).

“So on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which as we have already said is called Adar, when the slaughter of all the Jews was being readied and their enemies were eager for blood, the tables were turned and the Jews began to gain the upper hand, and to avenge themselves on their opponents. They assembled in each of the cities, towns and places, to stretch out their hands against their enemies and persecutors; and no one dared to resist, because the fear of their greatness had reached all the peoples.” The twelfth month, as we said before, symbolizes the last era of our world when the Redeemer has been made incarnate and the preaching of the Gospel itself has spread throughout the entire world. And in the same way, the thirteenth day declares the light of faith and of good works, which – as the Gospels predict – is fulfilled every day by the faithful. For in the twelfth month, “on the thirteenth day of the month, when the slaughter of all the Jews was being readied and their enemies were eager for blood, the tables were turned and the Jews began to gain the upper hand, and to avenge themselves on their opponents.” This means that even though the enemies and persecutors of the name of Christ are constantly stirring up attacks against the community of the faithful – which maintains the true expression of the correct faith – and making every effort to oppress them, the latter have been helped by the grace of God and strengthened with the shield of faith and the arms of justice so that they might defeat their adversaries and carry back from them the spoils of glory. This they do by

converting them to the light of faith and making them partners in the grace of Christ, after repelling their spiritual wickedness and the disseminators of error who were seducing them through various vices. "And no one dared to resist them." That is, the fear of God's majesty, which in the Church is made known by the gleam of miracles, thrashes soundly the hearts of fleshly creatures and compels them to yield to the word of God, which is naturally described in what follows:

"For the judges, commanders and governors of the provinces, and all the dignitaries who presided over every locale and every activity, were also extolling the Jews out of fear of Mordecai, because they knew he was in charge of the palace and had a great deal of power; and the fame of his name was growing greater every day, and was swiftly appearing on everyone's lips." That is, the praiseworthy actions of our sacred teachers and the power of the virtues gave great honor and reverence to the mass of the faithful. Hence in the Acts of the Apostles, where we read that these first preachers of the Gospel were trying to teach and to care for the word of God, it is written: "For they were devoted to the teachings of the apostles, and to breaking bread together, and to their prayers. Every soul was full of awe, and many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles in Jerusalem, and there was great fear among them all" (Acts 2). And likewise: "Many signs and wonders were being performed among the people by the apostles; and they were all together in the portico of Solomon. But none of the others dared to join them, though the people were paying them homage" (Acts 5).

"So the Jews struck their enemies a great blow; and they killed them and treated them as they had intended to treat the Jews, so much so that even in Shushan they killed five hundred people in addition to the ten sons of Haman the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews." What can it mean when we read that the Jews pursued their enemies and killed five hundred men in Shushan, except for the ten sons of Haman whom they nailed to gibbets? Merely that to the people of God, it is not only all the evildoers among the nations who appear to be loathsome and worthy of damnation when they persist in their wickedness, refuse to repent for their sins, and make no effort to obtain forgiveness for their offenses through the grace of the Holy Spirit; but also the actual Jews of the flesh, i.e. those who violated the Decalogue of the Law of Moses, and were guilty of the cross of Christ whom in their faithlessness they took responsibility for at his very passion, are quite rightly forced to bear the torments of Hell. And none of the chosen would deign to share in their wickedness, or to imitate their unspeakable actions; so it makes sense that the text would add that once the Jews had killed their enemies, they refused to touch or to handle any of the spoils of their property.

"And the total of those who were killed in Shushan was immediately relayed to the king, who said to the queen: 'In the city of Shushan the Jews have killed five hundred men, as well as the ten sons of Haman; how many do you think they are slaughtering in all of the provinces taken together? What else do you want, and what would you like me to command? She answered: 'If it pleases the king, let the Jews be given the power to do tomorrow just what they have done today in Shushan; and let the ten sons of Haman be hanged on gibbets.' And the king commanded that this be done" etc. This contention of Queen Esther, in which she fights to have her enemies aggressively attacked and wiped out, expresses the zeal and ingenuity of the true queen, that is, of the holy Church which harasses her enemies without respite and struggles to scatter them completely and subject them to itself. It is in her voice that the Psalmist speaks: "I will harass my enemies, and I will encompass them, and I will not turn away until they are ruined; I will afflict them, and they cannot stand" (Psalms 18). In Shushan she killed first five hundred men, then three hundred, since she shows that not only those who refuse to repent their sins, but also those who fail to adorn their faith in the holy Trinity with good works, are worthy of perpetual death. So it happens that just as the Jews killed, in the course of two days, seventy-five thousand of their enemies, so too the faithful strive and attempt to truly defeat and scatter, in the light of the two Testaments, all those enemies who – because they are devoted to the five senses of the body, and experience the Law of God in the flesh – refuse to know it in spirit, complete and perfected by spiritual dogma through the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit. And yet no one wants to touch any of their property, because the chosen believers would never consent to sully themselves with the wickedness of the damned; rather, they make themselves in every way foreign to and separate from the false dogmas, and the evil deeds, of such people.

CHAPTER XIII

About the fact that the days on which the Jews took their revenge were counted among their festivals.

"And the thirteenth day of Adar was for them all a day of killing, and on the fourteenth day they stopped the slaughter. And they established this day as a festival, so that from then on they would set that occasion aside for banquets, celebration and feasts. But

those who carried out the slaughter in the city of Shushan were occupied with the slaughter on both the thirteenth and the fourteenth days of that month; and on the fifteenth day they stopped their attacks, and so they established that same day as a festival for banqueting and rejoicing. On the other hand, the Jews who were living in unwallied towns and villages decreed the fourteenth day of the month of Adar a time of feasting and rejoicing, so that they exult in it and send one another portions of banquets and food." Now, the Scripture tells us that some of the Jews carried out the killing of their enemies on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and stopped their slaughter on the fourteenth day when they held this festival; but that others carried out the killing of their enemies for two days, i.e. the thirteenth and the fourteenth of the aforementioned month, and finally held a formal rest on the fifteenth when they left off the slaughter. And this can only mean that some of the saints, having completed the labors which they carried out in the service of God by performing it according to the proper doctrine and living it properly, now have in their hands – even before the time of universal judgment – the Sabbath rest of eternal peace; while others endure in the flesh until the final day of resurrection, so that once all their enemies have been bested they will be suddenly changed through God's power, and will attain eternal rest and blessed immortality for both their souls and their bodies. This we know from the statement that the apostle makes when he writes to the Corinthians: "Behold the mystery I am telling you: we will all, it is true, rise again, but we will not all be changed. In a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the final trumpet, the dead will rise up uncorrupted, and we will be changed" (1 Corinthians 15). And to the Thessalonians: "For this we say to you in the word of the Lord: we will not precede those who are sleeping, since the Lord himself – in his command, and in the voice of the archangel, and in the trumpet of God – will come down from Heaven. And the dead who are in Christ will rise up first, and then those of us who are still alive, we who still remain, will be taken up together with those in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord always" (1 Thessalonians 4).

After all, the number fourteen, which contains twice seven, symbolizes the rest of souls from labor and worry of every kind; and fifteen, which combines the numbers seven and eight, prefigures the coming rest and the immortality of both souls and bodies; and so, once the mass of the chosen have completed the labors of the present life and victory over every enemy has been achieved, they will rejoice in the kingdom of Heaven in their eternal exultation and their love for one another. And there will be no end to this joy, because there will no longer be any further labors to cause us unhappiness. The ingenuity of the sacred preachers communicates this to their listeners in such a way that it will be believed and perceived through the true doctrine; hence it then adds:

“So Mordecai wrote all these things, and recorded them in letters which he sent to the Jews who were living in all the king’s provinces, both the closer and the more distant ones; that they should adopt the fourteenth and the fifteenth days of the month of Adar as festivals, and mark them as regular occasions at the same time every year. Because on those very days the Jews avenged themselves on their enemies, and grief and sadness were turned into happiness and joy; and these were days of banqueting and rejoicing, when they would send one another portions of food and lavish small gifts upon the poor. And the Jews adopted as a solemn rite everything they had begun to do at that time, and everything that Mordecai had commanded them to do in his letters.” For those who always faithfully perform pious labors, and good works, and who generously give charity, are fighting for this so that they will be worthy to win entry to eternal life in faith, hope and charity, in accordance with the teachings of the Gospels and the apostles; and so that by comforting both themselves – and those who obey them – in the midst of the troubles of this world, they will gain strength. So by rejoicing in hope they are patient in times of tribulation, they pray without respite, they give thanks for everything, and with pious prayers they place their suffering in the hands of the faithful Lord so that they may be repaid, through his help, with eternal happiness.

“For Haman the son of Hamedatha of the line of Agag, the enemy and adversary of the Jews, intended evil against them to kill them and wipe them out; and he cast the *pur*, which means in our language *the lot*. And afterwards Esther went in to the king and begged him to use the royal decree to render void that man’s efforts, and to turn back upon his head the evil he had intended against the Jews. And finally, they nailed both him and his sons to a cross. And from then on those days have been called *Purim*, that is, *Lots*, because the *pur*, i.e. the *lot*, had been cast into the urn.” For wicked men often find that their desires are fulfilled in ways they had not expected to happen; and they are caught in the same traps they set to ensnare others, as the Scripture shows when it says: “The wicked are caught in their traps; and whoever digs a pit falls into it” (Proverbs 26). Hence Haman, who prefigures the enemies of the Church, was likewise forced to suffer the death he had planned for Mordecai. For the lot cast into an urn symbolizes the disposition of each and every thing in the mind of man, whose outcomes depend even so upon the judgment of God. Hence we are told by Solomon: “Lots are cast in the lap, but they are tempered by the Lord. For his way is not in the power of man; rather it belongs not to one who wills, or one who runs, but to God who grants mercy. For all things obey at his nod, and he does whatever he wishes in Heaven and on earth, on the sea and in all the depths” (Proverbs 16). The Scripture, then, shows how these days of lots should be remembered in future generations, when it says:

“The Jews took it upon themselves and their seed, and upon everyone who wanted to join their faith, to allow no one to let these two days pass without observing them; this is testified in the Scripture, and the fixed times in every successive year require it. These are days which will never fall into oblivion, and in every generation all the provinces throughout the world will celebrate them. Nor is there any city in which the days of *Purim*, i.e. of *Lots*, will not be observed by the Jews and by their descendants who have been bound to keep these rites.” So the days of lots – on which God gives his true followers victory over their enemies – will never fall into oblivion, but will be celebrated throughout the world in every generation since each of the faithful must declare, with firm hope, the coming rest of souls and the resurrection of bodies on the day of judgment; nor should any of the Churches of Christ throughout the world be bereft of this faith, but should be always mindful of this most salutary rite and be prepared at every moment, and should make themselves fit to receive the coming good so that what they celebrate here in this world they may possess there forever in faith and hope, in the truth of the thing itself and in eternal happiness. And for the present, while we are journeying through this life the ingenuity of the teachers, and the Church’s adherence to the precedent of Esther and Mordecai, ought to accomplish this along with us through teaching and exhortation, so that we are always devoted to the celebration and the cultivation of this faith. About this he adds:

“And Queen Esther the daughter of Abichail and Mordecai also wrote a second letter so that in the future, this day would be sanctified with complete devotion. And they sent messages to all the Jews who were living in the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of King Ahasuerus, telling them to have peace and adhere to the truth, observing the days of lots and celebrating them with joy in their season just as Mordecai and Esther had decided. And they adopted from them, and from their seed, the obligation to observe the fasts and the cries, and the days of lots, and everything that was contained in the account of this book which is called ‘Esther’.” For we require this admonition so that we will have always in our hearts the peace of Christianity, and will adopt the truth of the Gospel itself; which will prevent us from inadvertently falling, through discord and disagreement, into the errors of the heretics from which there can be no salvation but certain damnation and ruin. So all those who recognize that, through the seed of the word of God, they have been reborn in baptism from the Church and the ministry of the sacred teachers as sons to God the Father, are certainly required to fast in piety, i.e. to lead a pious, chaste and modest life; to send up the cries of their prayers and teachings; to celebrate the days of lots, i.e. of the victory to come, with reverence and firm hope; and to observe with robust faith and good works everything contained in the book of the two Testaments.

CHAPTER XIV

That King Ahasuerus exacted tribute from all the islands, which is where the Hebrew version of the story of Esther comes to an end.

“And King Ahasuerus exacted tribute from every land, and from all the islands of the sea; and his strength and power, and the honor and exaltation with which he raised up Mordecai. have been recorded in the books of the Medes and Persians, as well as how Mordecai of the Jewish race was second to King Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and found favor among the crowd of his brothers. He sought the best for his people, and whatever he said was concerned with the well-being of his seed.” Why are we told that King Ahasuerus exacted tribute from every land, and from all the islands of the sea? Because the historical king of the Persians and Medes never held every land under his sway, and could not exact tribute from all the islands of the sea since not even his name could have reached the aforementioned islands and parts of the world; whereas this statement more accurately reflects our king and Lord Christ, whose power is in Heaven, and on earth, and on the sea and in all the depths. In fact, in the Gospels he calls himself a gateway, since through him we gain the entry to eternal life; and according to a statement of the Psalmist: “The whole world, all the kings of the earth, adore him. All the kings of the earth will serve him, the kings of Tarshish and the islands will offer him gifts, the kings of Arabia and Sheba will bring presents” (Psalms 72). So the strength, and power, and dignity, and grandeur of this king, and how he raised up the true Mordecai – that is, the community of sacred teachers who were leaders of the Church at the head of the Christian people – are documented in the statements and the writings of not only the single people of Judea, but of all the nations as well. He has from the start exalted his chosen ones with the gift of his grace, and has glorified and honored them in the sight of all the nations; these seek the best for their people and whatever they say is concerned with the well-being of their seed, since according to the prophecy of Isaiah: “The watchmen of the Lord will lift up their voices, and will praise altogether (Isaiah 52); their feet are beautiful, the feet of those who bring the gospel of peace, the gospel of good things” (Romans 10). This is because they always ask after the peace of Jerusalem, and their seed will be known among the nations and their offshoots amid the peoples. All who have seen them will know them, because they are the seed which the Lord has blessed.