

Office Prayer in connection with the Jewish people

Thursday, March 3, 2022

Purim celebration

On March 16, Purim will be celebrated. Rabbi Yeshaya Dalsace explains the meaning of this holiday.

One day a year, there reigns among the Jews a particular atmosphere. Study, concentration and give way to unbridled joy, laughter, disguises... a real carnival, in a word, the Jews celebrate... What do they celebrate with so much jubilation?

As is often in Judaism, the feast refers to a biblical story. In the case of Purim, it is a famous story, that of Queen Esther.

At the time when the Jews lived in the Persian Empire, after the destruction of the first temple, around the 6th century BC. A young Jewish woman, Esther, chosen for her great beauty, becomes queen, wife of the king of Persia. But Prime Minister Haman is plotting and wants to kill all the Jews. Mordecai, Esther's uncle asks his niece to intervene with the king, to have the decree of extermination annulled.

Because of Esther's courage, Haman is confounded and ends up hanging from the gibbet he had erected for Mordecai the Jew. In the end all is well that ends well and the Jews are not only saved, but rid of all their enemies.

In this biblical book, God is exceptionally absent, at least in appearance. His name does not appear anywhere (...). Moreover, the name Esther in Hebrew means "hidden". More exactly, if God is naturally present, he advances masked concealed under the features of chance. If the Jews were saved from extermination, it was in fact thanks to a series of coincidences and a succession of providential chances.

The theme of chance, of fate, is so important that it is this very word who was named after him at the party. Pour, the lot, in the plural Purim, the lots, in memory of the fact that Haman, the anti-Semite, had cast lots for the date of the extermination of the Jews.

This curious tale, worthy of the Thousand and One nights, seeks to make us reflect on the functioning of a world left to chance, due to the absence of God.

The story offers many levels of reading and interpretation. The text first tells us: even if God seems absent from the world, we must not despair because good ends up triumphing over evil. But we must remain attentive: this only happens if we know how to remain as vigilant as Mordecai, to take our destiny into our own hands like Esther and not to shirk our responsibilities.