

4th Sunday, 07

There is a movie playing now entitled “The Queen.” It is a story about the present Queen of England, Elizabeth II, and her response to the death of the Princess Diana. The English actress Helen Mirren, who plays the Queen and looks just like the real Queen has been nominated for an Oscar, I believe, for her performance.

The gist of the story is that the Queen thought that the funeral of Diana should be a private, not a public affair, because Diana, after her divorce from Prince Charles, was no longer a member of the Royal Family. And so the queen who was away in Scotland at the time of Diana’s death did not return to London and did not make any public statement. But the public displeasure at her lack of response was so overwhelming that her new prime minister, Tony Blair, advised her that she had to make a statement and had to come to London for the funeral, and that the funeral had to be a state funeral, not a private one. In the movie, and I believe that here it is being faithful to the facts, the queen returns to Buckingham palace and actually gets out of her car to look at the bouquets of flowers

which people have left in front of the gates of Buckingham Palace to honor Diana. She reads one which says: they (the queen and her family) have your blood, Diana, on their hands. She has lost the affection of some of her people. Blair had already told her that times had changed and that she had to change with them. She had to modernize, she had to become more human, less reserved and aloof if she wanted to keep the affection of her people. Now she has proof of that. But in another scene she tells him in turn that he too will experience what she has experienced, that at some point in his career he will suffer a loss of popularity, an alienation of the people. But in still another scene Blair comes to the aid of the queen when the members of his own staff are critical of her behavior. Look, he says, this woman has given her life to this nation for the past half century and now she is being vilified because she won't honor a woman who denied everything she has stood for.

The movie reminded me of our Gospel for today. Jesus, as Luke portrays it, has returned to his hometown of Nazareth and to its synagogue where he reads from the Sacred Scriptures. At first the people are very favorably impressed. His words are gracious, they say. And then very quickly (indeed so quickly that some

commentators wonder whether two different and conflicting stories have been sewn together here) the mood of his hearers changes. “Isn’t this the son of Joseph?” they ask. In other words, we don’t have to be so in awe of this fellow. He is just one of us. And then comes the full change from favor to opposition when Jesus refuses to do for them what they had heard he had done in other places, namely, cure the sick. Now his words are no longer gracious to their ears, for he tells them that like the prophets Elija and Elisha before him he will perform miracles for foreigners and not simply for them, for the Jews. At that they are filled with fury and try to kill him, but he escapes.

In both this movie and in this Gospel scene an individual stands up against the crowd in order to be faithful to her and his vocation, and in doing so they provoke the anger of the crowd. Is there a lesson in that for us? We are not called to be a head of state, but we are called to be followers of Jesus. Therefore, it would seem that in some shape or form we should experience the alienation of the crowd. Not that we should seek out such an experience, for it is a hard one, and our first reaction should always be to create peace, not opposition, between ourselves and others. After all, our second reading today, the famous hymn to the superiority of the virtue of love over every other virtue, teaches us that we should approach all

people with love, that is, with a willingness to understand and respect them, and ordinarily that approach will engender love, not hate or alienation, in others. Nevertheless, we should be aware of the fact that the very fact that we have a particular way of living, that we follow certain commandments, and that we do not think that everything can be allowed or condoned, may and indeed at times will cause others to reject us and what we stand for. If we reject that possibility we are saying that we can go a different way than that of the Lord himself. We would be denying the fact that he achieved our salvation through suffering and death. No, at some times and places, we have to stand up and be counted and suffer the alienation that comes with such a stand.

Ordinarily that should happen between us and the world, but at times it can even happen within the community of believers itself. Paul and Peter fought. But if that happens within the church, within the community, let us be aware of the fact that such disputes and opposition must take place within the boundaries of the great law of love. And love is not a word for Paul. Love is a way of acting which can be clearly distinguished from its opposite: it is not rude or pompous or self-inflated, it is not selfish, nor hot-tempered. It holds no grudge. It does not seek revenge.

If we live in this way, then only the depraved will be our enemies. And if and when that happens, then we know we are in good company. We are with the prophets. We are with the Lord in the carrying of his cross