



PASSing with the *MGMA*
Language Arts

Activity 4: CREATIVE COLLOQUY

Who is Saint Justina of Padua?

“Saint Justina was a very popular saint of Padua and Venice, and many paintings were done through the Renaissance that commemorated and documented her importance in this region of Italy. She was born into a royal family from Padua in the A.D. 200’s, and her father, King Vitalicino, raised her as a Christian. At his death, the family lacked political protection, and Emperor Maximian then had Justina executed for her faith in A.D. 303.”

What is happening in the painting?

“In this painting, we see Saint Justina kneeling in the center of the composition, dressed in a classically inspired white robe, and opening her arms to receive her execution by sword that was ordered by Emperor Maximian. To [the] left, soldiers inflict the wound, while Justina’s head turns to [the] right, where we see two other figures, sometimes identified as her father King Vitalicino and St. Prosdocimo, a disciple of the Apostle Peter and saint popular in the area around Venice. The event takes place out of doors.... [A] bridge in the distance...reveals a scene of the capture of the saint. Classical,] ionic columns appear between Justina and the two figures to [the] right. The soldiers appear in shadow as they bend and turn toward Justina in their Byzantine outfits that [the artist] Veronese would have seen frequently in the port city of Venice. In contrast, the Christians stand still in a classicizing counter-poise stance, with the backdrop of classical columns to lend a sense of historical authority to their side.”

Excerpts from “Paolo Veronese’s Martyrdom of Saint Justina: Royal Saint of Padua” and unpublished paper presented by Dr. Allison Lee Palmer at the Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art, Shawnee, OK on January 20, 2000.

Who are Esther and Assuerus?

“Queen of Persia and wife of Assuerus... [Esther] was a Jewess of the tribe of Benjamin ...On the death of her parents she was adopted by her father's brother, Mardochai, who then dwelt in Susan, the capital of Persia. King Assuerus being angered at the refusal of his wife Vasthi to respond to his invitation to attend a banquet that he gave in the third year of his reign, divorced her and ordered the most attractive maidens of the kingdom brought before him that he might select her successor from among them. Among these was Esther, whose rare beauty captivated the king and moved him to place her on the throne. Her uncle Mardochai remained constantly near the palace so that he might advise and counsel her. While at the gate of the palace he discovered a plot of two of the king's eunuchs to kill their royal master. This plot he revealed to Esther, who in turn informed the king. The plotters were executed, and a record of the services of Mardochai was entered in the chronicles of the kingdom. Not long thereafter, Aman, a royal favourite before whom the king had ordered all to bow, having frequently observed Mardochai at the gate of the palace and noticed that he refused to prostrate himself before him, cunningly obtained the king's consent for a general massacre in one day of all the Jews in the kingdom...A royal decree was thereupon sent throughout the Kingdom of Persia. Mardochai informed Esther of this and begged her to use her influence with the king and thus avert the threatening danger. At first she feared to enter the presence of the king unsummoned, for to do so was a capital offence. But, on the earnest entreaty of her uncle, she consented to approach after three days, which with her maids she would pass in fasting and prayer, and during which she requested her uncle to have all the Jews in the city fast and pray.

“On the third day Esther appeared before the king, who received her graciously and promised to grant her request whatever it might be. She then asked him and Aman to dine with her. At the banquet they accepted her invitation to dine with her again on the following day. Aman, carried away by the joy that this honour gave him, issued orders for the erection of a gallows on which he purposed to hang the hated Mardochai. But that night the king, being sleepless, ordered the chronicles of the nation to be read to him. Learning that Mardochai had never been rewarded for his service in revealing the plot of the eunuchs, he asked Aman, the next day, to suggest a suitable reward for one "whom the king desired to honour". Thinking it was himself that the king had in mind, Aman suggested the use of the king's apparel and insignia...the king ordered [these] to be bestowed on Mardochai. At the second banquet, when the king repeated to Esther his offer to grant her whatever she might ask, she informed him of the plot of Aman which involved the destruction of the whole Jewish people to which she belonged, and pleaded that they should be spared. The king ordered that Aman should be hanged on the gibbet prepared for Mardochai, and, confiscating his property, bestowed it upon the intended victim. He charged Mardochai to address to all the governors of Persia letters authorizing the Jews to defend themselves... Mardochai then instituted the feast of Purim (lots) which he exhorted the Jews to celebrate in memory of the day which Aman had determined for their destruction, but which had been turned by Esther into a day of triumph.”

*Excerpted from the New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia article “Esther” available at:
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05549a.htm>.*

What is happening in the painting? Read the biblical scripture to find out!

Esther 4:11-16: All the king's servants, and all the provinces that are under his dominion, know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, cometh into the king's inner court, who is not called for, is immediately to be put to death without any delay: except the king shall hold out the golden sceptre to him, in token of clemency, that so he may live. How then can I go in to the king, who for these thirty days now have not been called unto him? And when Mardochai had heard this, he sent word to Esther again, saying: Think not that thou mayst save thy life only, because thou art in the king's house, more than all the Jews: For if thou wilt now hold thy peace, the Jews shall be delivered by some other occasion: and thou, and thy father's house shall perish. And who knoweth whether thou art not therefore come to the kingdom, that thou mightest be ready in such a time as this? And again Esther sent to Mardochai in these words: Go, and gather together all the Jews whom thou shalt find in Susan, and pray ye for me. Neither eat nor drink for three days and three nights: and I with my handmaids will fast in like manner, and then I will go in to the king, against the law, not being called, and expose myself to death and to danger.

Esther 5:1-3: And on the third day Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's hall: now he sat upon his throne in the hall of the palace, over against the door of the house. And when he saw Esther the queen standing, she pleased his eyes, and he held out toward her the golden sceptre, which he held in his hand and she drew near, and kissed the top of his sceptre. And the king said to her: What wilt thou, Queen Esther? What is thy request? If thou shouldst even ask one half of the kingdom, it shall be given to thee.

