

Lux Center News



February 28, 2018

February Has Come and Will Soon Be Gone

When it comes to holidays in the month of February, most immediately think of Valentine's Day, a day to think about the people whom we love. February 2018, however has embraced two more holidays. For Christians, it is Lent that began with Ash Wednesday and that fell on the same day as Valentine's Day. For the Jewish people, it is Purim which is actually celebrated today.

The Christian Celebration of Lent - Simply Stated

Celebrated by Catholics and some Protestants, Lent is a solemn religious time of reflection, repentance, and a contemplation of sacrifice beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending on Easter Sunday. The purpose of Lent is for the believer to prepare for Easter through prayer, doing penance, repenting sins, giving to the poor and self-denial. The annual commemoration of Holy Week preceding Easter heightens this purpose and will mark the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus that is recalled in the tradition and events of the New Testament beginning on Palm Sunday, climaxing on the commemoration of Jesus' crucifixion on Good Friday, which ultimately culminates in the joyful celebration on Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of Jesus.

The most well-known practice during Lent is giving up certain luxuries during this season. Most will traditionally abstain from eating meat on Fridays for the 40 days of Lent in commemoration of the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the desert, during which he endured temptation by Satan, before beginning his public ministry according to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. By giving up something for this period of time, it is possible to refocus one's mind and heart in order to be reminded that ultimate satisfaction comes only from God.

The Jewish Holiday of Purim

Today, Jews around the world are celebrating the joyous holiday of Purim (literally means Feast of Lots). Purim recounts the saving of the Jews from a threatened massacre during the Persian period (539-330 BCE). The origins of Purim appear in the Hebrew biblical Book of Esther, in which Esther is the heroine who plays a leading role in saving her people from annihilation. Her ability to act is the ultimate testament to faith in a story where God is concealed and a reminder of the essential power of humans' actions.

Purim is the quintessential community holiday. The centerpiece of the communal celebration is the reading of the Scroll of Esther, called the *Megillah*, in the synagogue. This is a wild affair, with hollers and noise being made every time that the evil Haman's name is mentioned. It is a time to dress in costume, eat triangular filled pastries called *hamantaschen*, and play games, often at a synagogue carnival. On the serious side, the holiday begins with a fast and ends with a feast, and it is also a time to give gifts to friends and to the poor.

The Book of Esther was the last book of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) to be canonized. Purim is the only Jewish holiday that is not addressed in the Torah (Five Books of Moses), as Esther is part of the section of the Bible known as Writings. The observance of Purim was mandated in the *Megillah* in order to commemorate a "historical" event of Jewish deliverance. Purim is also the only festival in the Jewish year that was set in Persia, a land outside of Israel. Every other festival is either based on events that happened in Israel or on the journey toward Israel. The Book of Esther is one of the only two books in the Hebrew Bible that does not contain the name of God (although the Greek versions of Esther contain a number of additions—including God's name). While the Song of Songs is a book about God's love for us, Esther is a fearful book because it records the moment when it was resolved "to destroy, to slay, and to exterminate all Jews, young and old, children and women, in a single day" (Esther 3:13).

The Jewish response to this traumatic event was to defeat fear through joy, through collective celebration. Humor is the Jewish way of defeating hate. What you can laugh at, you cannot be held captive by.

The Purim Story in a Nutshell

A young, beautiful Jewish woman, Esther, rises to be Queen of Persia under the tutelage of her guardian Mordecai. However, the Jews have enemies, and a certain Haman, the grand vizier, plots the Jews' destruction. Even though Esther has hidden her Jewish identity from all, Mordecai prevails on her to risk her life by revealing her true identity to the king. She does this and denounces the plot created by Haman. King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I, reigned 485-465 BCE) springs to the defense of his beloved queen, Haman is executed, and Mordecai is elevated to the office of grand vizier. In the end, the Jews were able to turn the tables on their enemies. This story has been embraced by the Jewish community because of the hope that it gives a minority living in an often times hostile majority culture.

Women of Valor

Women protagonists in both Christian and Jewish biblical and modern history are a minority. In the ancient world and even today in many cultures, women are essentially powerless and marginalized members of society. It is rare that women could simply reach out and grasp power and effectively make changes in the society in which they lived, as a man could. That is why it is important to note those women who have been able to manipulate whatever resources were at their disposal, to essentially use their wits and talents in order to truly affect the world, and to bravely stand up for what they believe. We need to be certain to acknowledge these women of action.

Queen Esther

Every Jewish young girl, at some time sees themselves as Esther. She is undoubtedly the hero of the Purim story. By use of her beauty, charm, political intelligence, and by taking one well-placed risk, Esther saves her people, brings about the downfall of their enemy, and

elevates her Uncle Mordecai to the highest position in the kingdom next to the king. She did not accomplish these things by might or by raising a loud voice but by bravely risking her life and operating within existing systems to get what she wanted. Esther could be known as a quiet leader and a role model for us all.

Sister Rose Thering

Sister Rose Thering was a Roman Catholic nun and a former professor at Seton Hall University who battled anti-Semitism within the Catholic Church and contributed to a historic Vatican II declaration that Jews were not collectively responsible for the death of Jesus.

She was born in 1920, the sixth of eleven children, on a Wisconsin farm. She entered St. Catherine of Siena Convent of the Sisters of St. Dominic in Racine at age 16 and then earned a bachelor's degree from Dominican College in Racine in 1953, a master's degree from the College of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1957 and a doctorate at St. Louis University four years later.

The message of intolerance toward the Jews that she found in Catholic text books was greatly unsettling to her. Her doctoral dissertation was devoted to the Catholic Church's teachings about Jews and other religions. Her research examined how Catholic teaching materials dealt with ethnic groups and other faiths, primarily Jews and Judaism.

Monsignor Robert Sheeran, former president of Seton Hall University, said of Sister Rose, "For a half-century she was an uncommon, inspired voice of reconciliation and dialogue among Christians and Jews. Her support for the nation of Israel, her determination to root out anti-Semitism wherever it exists, and her commitment to education new generations about the evils of the Holocaust Form her lasting legacy."

Abraham H. Foxman, immediate past National Director of the Anti-Defamation League, added "Sister Rose has set a standard for all of us—people of all faiths—to emulate. When she saw a wrong, she questioned it, and then set out determined to correct it. She changed the course of history through her words and through her deeds."

Sister Rose was honored in the acclaimed 2004 documentary film *Sister Rose's Passion* which explored the legacy of her work. She died in 2006.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sr. Rose Thering Award Dinner

The Lux Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology is proud to establish the Sister Rose Thering Award for Contributions to Interreligious Relations. Fr. John T. Pawlikowski, Professor Emeritus of Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, will be the first recipient of this award. The award will be presented to Fr. Pawlikowski at a dinner in his honor on Thursday, May 3, 2018 at 6:00 p.m. at the Boerner Botanical Gardens in Hales Corners, Wisconsin. The dinner is open to the public and all are welcome. For more information, contact Bonnie Shafrin at bshafrin@shsst.edu or call 414-529-6966.

Lux Center 2018 Spring Lectures

The Lux Center Spring Lecture Series will be held on **March 11-12**. The keynote speaker will be Rabbi Or Rose who is the founding Director of the Betty Ann Greenbaum Miller Center for

Interreligious Learning & Leadership of Hebrew College in Boston. He will deliver the following lectures:

Sunday, March 11, 2 pm at SHSST Public Lecture

“Calling Out from the Depths: Reading the Psalms in Two Voices”

For centuries, Jews and Christians have turned to the Book of Psalms in times of joy and thanksgiving, and in times of sadness and lament. However, there have been far fewer opportunities for members of these two communities and others to explore these ancient poetic texts together as fellow spiritual seekers.

To attend the public lecture, please register at luxcenter.shsst.edu or contact Bonnie Shafrin at bshafrin@shsst.edu.

Monday, March 12, 9-10:20 a.m. Seminary Lecture for Students and Faculty

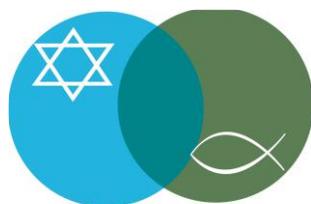
“Deepening the Spiritual Self through Interreligious Learning”

Why is it valuable for future religious leaders to engage in interreligious learning? How can learning with the religious other help us better understand ourselves as religious practitioners and leaders, at once committed to our specific religious traditions and dedicated to cultivating justice and peace among the peoples of the world?

Monday, March 12, noon Theologian Lunch and Learn (by invitation only)

“A Dialogue of Devotion: Thomas Merton and Zalman Schacter-Shalomi “

Between 1961-1968, Zalman Scachter-Shalomi (d. 2014) and Thomas Merton (d. 1968) developed a close friendship. This relationship not only had a significant influence on these two men, but by extension, on the countless numbers of people they touched through their teachings, counseling, and writing. Rabbi Rose will explore the legacy of this relationship as a model for interreligious engagement today.



The Lux Center
for Catholic-Jewish Studies
at Sacred Heart Seminary and
School of Theology

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