

Signal fire

Last summit, the Empress made the conscious choice to not insert herself into the deliberation on preaching in Asavea. They did not veto the Senate's choice to criminalise it, and did nothing to impede the Synod in its mandate. She believed that this was a choice that determines who we are, and one that the people of the Empire needed to make without her hand. She will continue to accept the Empire's choice, whether the Synod's veto is successful or not. Within her Cabinet, she has both Aspar, the architect of this endeavour, and some of its harshest critics. She has listened to both.

This is our choice. This is your choice. I have been entrusted with the duty of addressing you not to demand one action over another, but so that on her behalf, I may guide you to act decisively.

I have been told, 'you cannot put a price on a soul.' It is true that a soul is the single most important thing in creation. The salvation of souls is the purpose of our Empire. But the salvation of souls always has a price. It will take something from you: energy, coin, loved ones, prestige. Perhaps you are willing to give these. Perhaps you are willing to give everything. But you must know that price because you must be able to pay it. Or you have lost everything and saved nothing.

The Synod calls for missionaries to spread the Way to Asavea. Slavers and heretics, there is no doubt that the Plenum must some day change or some day fall. Perhaps the time is now. Perhaps our missionaries must travel, inspiring even the lowliest of slaves with teachings of the Way and guiding them to tear down that which shackles their lives, their Virtue, their souls. It is the position of the Emperor that the Synod has acted

in extreme virtue in passing this mandate, and that those who embark on this task cannot be faulted or condemned in their commitment to the Way and the grand purpose of this Empire, regardless of its legality. She knows that it is the will of the Empire's priests to see this done and applauds their virtue.

What the Emperor wishes, however, is when the priests of the Empire take on this formidable task, that they do so in Wisdom and in Vigilance. That they know, fully and completely, what this will mean for them and for the Empire. That they know the costs they will incur and who will have to pay them. She demands this, not to discourage, but so that when the time comes for the Empire to pay its dues, it is prepared.

There will be a response from Asavea. And there will be a cost. Our wars on all fronts are already at a knife-edge as we trade lands with our foes through the shattering of spears. If Asavea push and our shields fall, there will be a cost. If we want our shields to hold, there will be a cost.

The flame of Virtue does not feed armies. The necessity of saving souls does not build the walls that keep us safe or sharpen the swords that drive our enemies back. I have needed that fire in my darkest moments, needed the strength it gives, the guidance it provides; I have needed those flames to achieve everything I have ever built or saved. Heed my words, for I have brought Pride to the swamps of Kallavesa to bolster Wintermark in its hour of need and salvation to the thousand souls of Zephaniah's Lament, and for all of that, I have been willing to give everything. But if a price had not been paid, there would be nothing but ash.

Perhaps you are prepared to pay. Perhaps to save the souls in Asavea, you will risk your life, sacrifice all material wealth, and imperil your home. But what if you are not asked? What if the price is lands far from yours, homes far from yours, families

far from yours? Perhaps you are prepared to sacrifice everything. What are you prepared to take?

Turn your back on the Brass Coast to spread the Way abroad, and you are taking it. Or the Marches. Or Therunin. Navarr has declared that now is the time to fulfil the oldest of their oaths and take the fight to the Vallorn; will you sacrifice that? Or the Holy City? The Empire must spread the Way. The Empire must protect its people. The Empire must inspire Virtue across the world. The Empire must earn and deserve the Loyalty of its citizens. Can we do it all? What if you must choose? What will you choose?

Do not be children and assume the worst will not happen; that is Hope. If you will spread the Way across the world, take responsibility. Turn to those who are most imperilled, look them in the eye, and tell them you demand they make the necessary sacrifice. If you cannot do that, you have two choices: uplift the people here and leave the horizon be - or work. Work to shore up our armies, work to shore up our homes. We know Asavea will attack our trade ships, and I have heard priests scoff at the loss of sixty thrones a season in revenue as a petty, material concern. Sixty thrones is more than the cost of feeding an army for a season. I am a senator of this Empire, responsible for finding those funds, and I cannot feed an army with the flames of your Ambition. The Empire exists to spread the Way, but to fulfil that duty, the Empire must exist.

*Choose. This very season, Leonora van Holberg advised readers of *The Looking Glass*, 'act decisively, or do not act at all.' I take the liberty to extend that same challenge to you all now. You say you will pay the price for a soul. Can you? If not, will you stay your hand, and instead fight for hearth and home? If not, who will you demand makes that sacrifice?*

Or what will you do so they must not sacrifice? If it is your will

to persevere, to send these missionaries, then I will fight with every breath so the Empire weathers and supports this holy task. But if that is your will, then I need your help. The Empire needs your help. We cannot chase souls on the horizon and neglect souls at home.

What is the worth of a soul? The answer is simple: everything. If you will have us take up this fight, then that is what the Empire needs from you to fulfil this holy duty. Everything. Do not be cowards and assume others will find the solution, or turn a blind eye as someone else pays the price. If you seek to save the souls abroad, do not dare abandon the souls of those close to home, those who place their trust in the Empire, those who rely on us to keep them safe. Pay the price of a soul and give me everything you have.

Or look those next to you in the eye and tell them you are sacrificing all they have.

Rane Shard-Bearer

Overview

Emperor Vesna has used their power to address the Empire to allow Rane Shard-Bearer, Senator for Kallavesa, to send a personal message to all Imperial citizens. As usual, the civil service has ensured the message is heard by citizens across the Empire and beyond. Rane, in her role as senator, raised the Senate motion to criminalise preaching the Way in Asavea which, while it passed in the Imperial Senate, still awaits the outcome of the Judgement of Veto raised against it in the General Assembly before it becomes law. The judgement will be resolved at the Autumn Equinox.

Some of the ramifications of preaching the Way in Asavea can be found in last season's Drumbeat of war wind of fortune.

Further discussion of the situation, including notes about the veto and its implications, will be found in an upcoming wind of fortune this season.

Significance

The Throne has the power to nominate a single Imperial citizen who can deliver a message to the people of the Empire each summit. It is common practice for The Throne to use this power themselves, when they wish to speak to all their people about important matters.