

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - 2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14

The title of 1 and 2 Maccabees is taken from the surname of Judas Maccabeus (1 Maccabees 2:4), the hero of the war of Jewish independence against Syria. The two books have separate authors. The first book is thought to have originally been written in Hebrew, although only a Greek translation survives, by a Palestinian Jew around 100 B.C. The second book is believed to have been composed in Greek by an Alexandrian Pharisee about 124 B.C. So, in fact, the second book was written before the first.

Both books encompass a similar period in Jewish history, the first book covering 175 to 135 B.C., and the second covering 175 to 161 B.C.

After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C., Egypt and Syria contended over the possession of Palestine. The kings of Egypt, known as the Ptolemies, retained the overlordship over the Jews for more than 100 years. They treated the Jews mildly and permitted them to live undisturbed according to the laws of Moses. Still, Greek habits and ideas were widely adopted in Palestine, Greek culture (Hellenism) casting its spell especially over the higher classes. In 198 B.C., Antiochus II, Seleucid king of Syria, conquered Palestine and incorporated it with his own kingdom. The conqueror himself did not interfere with the religious life of the Jews, but his son and successor, Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), who ruled from 175 to 164 B.C. tried to force paganism upon all his subjects. In 170 he plundered the Temple and slew many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Two years later he threw a garrison into the citadel and ordered all Jews under pain of death to adopt pagan rites and customs. A statue of Zeus was placed above the altar of burnt offerings, and an edict was issued ordaining the erection of heathen altars in every town of Palestine. Many apostatized; but many also preferred to suffer torture and death rather than transgress the law of God.

The second book of Maccabees is important from a doctrinal point of view: it aims at bringing out strongly the religious lessons of the time, the book being written more as a sermon than a history. It includes such fundamental texts as that which states that God created all things out of nothing and those which make it clear that the sacrifice of martyrs is a voluntary form of atonement which placates God's anger. Other texts lay stress on the intercession of the saints, and the value of prayers for the dead.

To better understand our first reading we will read all of 2 Maccabees, Chapter 7.

7:1 It [] happened that seven brothers with their mother were arrested and tortured with whips and scourges by the king,

Since the story is contrived for maximum impact, the chief persecutor himself is addressed.

to force them to eat pork in violation of God's law. ² One of the brothers, speaking for the others, said: "What do you expect to achieve by questioning us? We are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors."

³ At that the king, in a fury, gave orders to have pans and caldrons heated. ⁴ While they were being quickly heated, he commanded his executioners to cut out the tongue of the one who had spoken for the others, to scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, while the rest of his brothers and his mother looked on. ⁵ When he was completely maimed but still breathing, the king ordered them to carry him to the fire and fry him. As a cloud of smoke spread from the pan, the brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die bravely, saying such words as these: ⁶ "The Lord God is looking on, and he truly has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his canticle, when he protested openly with the words, 'And he will have pity on his servants.'"

⁷ When the first brother had died in this manner, they brought the second to be made sport of. After tearing off the skin and hair of his head, they asked him, "Will you eat the pork rather than have your body tortured limb by limb?" ⁸ Answering in the language of his forefathers, he said, "Never!" So he too in turn suffered the same tortures as the first. ⁹ At the point of death he said: "You accursed fiend, you are depriving us of this present life, but the King of the world will raise us up to live again forever. It is for his laws that we are dying."

¹⁰ After him the third suffered their cruel sport. He put out his tongue at once when told to do so, and bravely held out his hands, ¹¹ as he spoke these noble words: "It was from Heaven that I received these; for the sake of his laws I disdain them; from him I hope to receive them again." ¹² Even the king and his attendants marveled at the young man's courage, because he regarded his sufferings as nothing.

¹³ After he had died, they tortured and maltreated the fourth brother in the same way. ¹⁴ When he was near death, he said, "It is my choice to die at the hands of men with the God-given hope of being restored to life by him; but for you, there will be no resurrection to life."

¹⁵ They next brought forward the fifth brother and maltreated him. Looking at the king, ¹⁶ he said: "Since you have power among men, mortal though you are, do what you please. But do not think that our nation is forsaken by God. ¹⁷ Only wait, and you will see how his great power will torment you and your descendants."

¹⁸ After him they brought the sixth brother. When he was about to die, he said: "Have no vain illusions. We suffer these things on our own account, because we have sinned against our God; that is why such astonishing things have happened to us. ¹⁹ Do not think, then, that you will go unpunished for having dared to fight against God."

²⁰ Most admirable and worthy of everlasting remembrance was the mother, who saw her seven sons perish in a single day, yet bore it courageously because of her hope in the Lord. ²¹ Filled with a noble spirit that stirred her womanly heart with manly courage, she exhorted each of

them in the language of their forefathers with these words: ²² “I do not know how you came into existence in my womb; it was not I who gave you the breath of life, nor was it I who set in order the elements of which each of you is composed. ²³ Therefore, since it is the Creator of the universe who shapes each man’s beginning, as he brings about the origin of everything, he, in his mercy, will give you back both breath and life, because you now disregard yourselves for the sake of his law.”

²⁴ Antiochus, suspecting insult in her words, thought he was being ridiculed. As the youngest brother was still alive, the king appealed to him, not with mere words, but with promises on oath, to make him rich and happy if he would abandon his ancestral customs: he would make him his Friend and entrust him with high office. ²⁵ When the youth paid no attention to him at all, the king appealed to the mother, urging her to advise her boy to save his life. ²⁶ After he had urged her for a long time, she went through the motions of persuading her son. ²⁷ In derision of the cruel tyrant, she leaned over close to her son and said in their native language: “Son, have pity on me, who carried you in my womb for nine months, nursed you for three years, brought you up, educated and supported you to your present age. ²⁸ I beg you, child, to look at the heavens and the earth and see all that is in them; then you will know that God did not make them out of existing things; and in the same way the human race came into existence. ²⁹ Do not be afraid of this executioner, but be worthy of your brothers and accept death, so that in the time of mercy I may receive you again with them.”

³⁰ She had scarcely finished speaking when the youth said: “What are you waiting for? I will not obey the king’s command. I obey the command of the law given to our forefathers through Moses. ³¹ But you, who have contrived every kind of affliction for the Hebrews, will not escape the hands of God. ³² We, indeed, are suffering because of our sins. ³³ Though our living Lord treats us harshly for a little while to correct us with chastisements, he will again be reconciled with his servants. ³⁴ But you, wretch, vilest of all men! do not, in your insolence, concern yourself with unfounded hopes, as you raise your hand against the children of Heaven. ³⁵ You have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty and all-seeing God. ³⁶ My brothers, after enduring brief pain, have drunk of never-failing life, under God’s covenant, but you, by the judgment of God, shall receive just punishments for your arrogance. ³⁷ Like my brothers, I offer up my body and my life for our ancestral laws, imploring God to show mercy soon to our nation, and by afflictions and blows to make you confess that he alone is God. ³⁸ Through me and my brothers, may there be an end to the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation.”

³⁹ At that, the king became enraged and treated him even worse than the others, since he bitterly resented the boy’s contempt. ⁴⁰ Thus he too died undefiled, putting all his trust in the Lord.

⁴¹ The mother was last to die, after her sons.

⁴² Enough has been said about the sacrificial meals and the excessive cruelties.

There is a progression in the words the brothers address to the king before dying:

- 1) The just die rather than sin.

- 2) God will raise them up.
- 3) They will rise with bodies fully restored.
- 4) For the wicked there will be no resurrection to life.
- 5) Instead of resurrection, God will punish them.
- 6) The just suffer because of their sins, as will the wicked.
- 7) The death of the saints has imperatory (obtain by entreaty or petition) and even expiatory (make atonement) value.

Thus, the sacred author states the theology of martyrdom and the resurrection of the just.

2nd Reading - 2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5

Last week we began our study of 2 Thessalonians. Recall that this letter was written to clear up some misunderstandings caused by the first letter. The misunderstandings concerned the second coming and when it would occur. Some had even given up working in anticipation of the event. Paul wrote to assure them that no one knew when it would occur and that they were to keep on working until the end. Today we hear Paul's prayer for strengthening.

¹⁶ May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting encouragement and good hope through his grace,

Saint Paul stresses the gratuity of the gift. The gift is freely given to those who will accept it.

¹⁷ encourage your hearts and strengthen them in every good deed and word. ^{3:1} Finally, brothers, pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may speed forward and be glorified, as it did among you,

And how did the word of the Lord speed forward and was glorified? The verse before our reading today says for them to "hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours." The oral traditions were not new revelation, but interpretations of the written word.

"From this it is clear that they did not hand down everything by letter, but there was much also that was not written. Like that which was written, the unwritten too is worthy of belief. So let us regard the tradition of the Church also as worthy of belief. Is it a tradition? Seek no further." [Saint John Chrysostom (between A.D. 398-404), *Homilies on the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians* 4,2]

² and that we may be delivered from perverse and wicked people, for not all have faith.

Paul is requesting prayers for the continuous progress of the gospel and for those who deliver it. We must always pray for our pope, bishops, priests, catechists and evangelists.

³ But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.

Satan.

⁴ We are confident of you in the Lord that what we instruct you, you (both) are doing and will continue to do. ⁵ May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the endurance of Christ.

Prayer for an increase in the gift of God's love and in the patient endurance of which Christ is both the example and the donor (see Romans 15:5).

Gospel - Luke 20:27-38

Jesus is now in Jerusalem for His passion. He has made His triumphal entry which we celebrate on Passion (Palm) Sunday, he has upset the establishment by cleansing the temple. The Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees are all now interested in getting rid of Him.

²⁷ Some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection, came forward and put this question to him, ²⁸ saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us, 'If someone's brother dies leaving a wife but no child, his brother must take the wife and raise up descendants for his brother.'

The question refers to the so-called levirate marriage (see Deuteronomy 25:5-10).

²⁹ Now there were seven brothers; the first married a woman but died childless. ³⁰ Then the second ³¹ and the third married her, and likewise all the seven died childless. ³² Finally the woman also died. ³³ Now at the resurrection whose wife will that woman be? For all seven had been married to her." ³⁴ Jesus said to them, "The children of this age marry and remarry; ³⁵ but those who are deemed worthy to attain to the coming age and to the resurrection of the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage.

Such Christians will share the heavenly blessedness of freedom from "the cares and pleasures of life."

³⁶ They can no longer die, for they are like angels; and they are the children of God because they are the ones who will rise.

Jesus' answer attacks the basic premise of the Sadducees: The life of the age to come is a continuation of this life and therefore needs human propagation lest it die out.

³⁷ That the dead will rise even Moses made known in the passage about the bush,

Exodus 3:2-6.

when he called 'Lord' the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; ³⁸ and he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive."

Since God is the God of the living, God must have sustained the dead Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in life by resurrecting them.