

Thirty Second Sunday of the Year November 06, 2016

Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5; Luke 20:27-38

Christian belief in immortality is unique and special. The Gospel tells us of the Good News of the fullness of life in this age and of the resurrection in the age to come. For us death is a door that opens us to full of surprises and not a wall which blinds us from every possible vision. Our resurrection gives us the hope that we will be with God fully alive and active fulfilling the call that God has given us. In the first reading of today we have the story of the martyrdom of seven brothers who urged by their mother remained faithful to God with the hope that they will enjoy the glory of the resurrection to come. In the Gospel Jesus responds to a challenge from the Sadducees by teaching that resurrection life is far different from anything experienced on earth. The Sadducees as a group which did not believe in resurrection and they confront Jesus who tells them the meaning of resurrection. A resurrected person would be alive with God praising and thanking him and experiencing a life totally different from the earthly life. In the second reading we have Paul praying that Jesus and Father will help the people to persevere in living the Gospel and tells them not to be over anxious about the situation of afterlife or the end of the world. They must persevere in their faith and show their loyalty to God in Jesus. This is the fulfilment of their life.

Today's First Reading taken from the second book of Maccabees tells us that God's servants remain loyal even in the face of death as they know that they will be with God. Judas Maccabeus was the key figure in the struggle to preserve the traditions of God's chosen people. Here we have the story of the martyrdom of the mother and her seven sons. Each one of them was willing to die for the Law of Moses because they believed in after life and that at the last trumpet, the King of the universe would raise them up to an everlasting life. They were ready to die rather than sin, trusting in the Lord God to raise them up again with their bodies being fully restored. Theirs was an incredible faith displayed in the face of death and torture. Each son seems to proclaim more eloquently than the one before him faith in God and conviction of life after death. The reading concludes with the testimony of the fourth son who warns his persecutors that their crimes will gain them no joy in the world to come. He tells them that one cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. He tells his torturers that they will have be no resurrection to life awaiting them because of their wickedness. On the other hand shame and everlasting contempt awaits the wicked. They were sustained and strengthened in their sufferings by the pious exhortation of their faith-inspired mother. More so they were firmly convinced that God of the Universe, the God of Justice and love, had glorious eternal life in store for them.

Today's Second Reading from the Second Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians opens our eyes to the fact that the Lord strengthens our hearts in every good work and word. Paul prays that Jesus and his loving Father will give the Thessalonians the help they need to be courageous and hopeful in living up to the Gospel and proclaiming it to others. We learn that through prayer, the word and the work of the Lord that is manifested through us rapidly spreads and in this way God is glorified everywhere. Through our prayers for each other, we faithful children of God are rescued from the wicked and evil people. Paul tells them that the Lord is faithful, strengthening and guarding them against the evil one. To protect all, God placed His Holy Spirit within each and every one of us so that those baptized may follow His statutes and keep His ordinances and obey them. Here we experience the humanness of Paul, who tells them that he is begging Christ and God the Father to console and strengthen them so that they may continue to live their faith. In return he asks them to pray that he will be able to continue to spread the Christian faith to many others. At the same time the Apostle expresses his confidence that Christ will continue to guard and strengthen them in their loyal service to the faith and precepts which he Paul had given them. He reminds them that Jesus is faithful and will protect them from the evil one and help them grow in the love of the Father.

In today's Gospel Jesus is challenged by a group of Sadducees concerning the resurrection of the dead. Just before this he had been challenged by their opponents, the Pharisees and Scribes, who tried to force Jesus into an untenable position by asking him if taxes should be paid to Caesar or not. Jesus had dealt effectively with them and reduced them to silence. The Sadducees were looked down on by the Pharisees. They were seen as materialistic opportunists who tried to keep on the right side of the Roman authorities. The Sadducees seem to have been a Jewish group closely aligned with the aristocratic and priestly classes. They were all very wealthy, nearly all were priests, they were the governing class, they accepted only the written law of the Old Testament, they particularly stressed the Law of Moses, they invested nothing in the prophetic books, they did not believe in the resurrection from the dead, angels or spirits. They believed that for better or for worse man operated with unrestricted free will. They did not believe in the coming of a Messiah. The Sadducees wanted a very simple and structured predictable life. They wanted things neat and orderly. They wanted no surprises and left nothing left to speculation. They wanted the future to be predictable and orderly, leaving nothing to imagination. Even in their religious beliefs there were great differences. They rejected the authority of the oral tradition and denied belief in the resurrection. The Pharisees and majority of Jews on the other hand believed in the resurrection after death. Since they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, the sincerity of their challenge can be questioned. The example they use to confront Jesus is the OT teaching about marriage and the practice aimed to

protect family rights and provide security to a widow. They were aware that Jesus taught the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead and they wanted to prove their point of ridiculing Jesus and destroy his public image.

The Gospel reading gives us the fictitious story of seven brothers marrying one woman and their relation with each other in the other life. Their question in the Gospel is certainly insincere and the near impossible example they use regarding the seven brothers is purposely meant to sound silly in order to ridicule a belief in the resurrection. The practice of Levirate marriage of OT was based on a presupposition that a person lives on in his or her descendants and in their memory. To was considered important to protect the property rights. To assure that a person would have descendants to carry on the family memory, it was understood that if a man died without children, the next brother was obligated to take the deceased brother's wife and have children by her. Legally the child would be considered the offspring of the deceased brother and his wife. In fact their question radiated that sarcasm and ridicule and they never sincerely expected a response from Jesus. Their aim was to corner Jesus into an improbable religious belief and make him a laughing stock before the people. In reality the Sadducees did not themselves believe in resurrection from the dead.

Jesus does not address the Sadducees' question directly. Instead he makes the point that the resurrected life is totally different from any kind of life experienced on earth, including married life. In other words, the Sadducees' example and question does not pertain to all to what the resurrection life is. Resurrection life refers to a radical new order of life that cannot be compared with anything on earth. Jesus supports his understanding of the doctrine of the resurrection by proclaiming that God is God not of the dead but of the living. This would imply that somehow the Patriarchs must be alive to God or in God. This logic is not easy to follow but does not diminish Jesus' main point about resurrection life being radically different from earthly life. In fact when Jesus responds in a rational way, giving them a well thought out explanation using the very figure that they had invoked, namely, Moses. In the first part of his answer Jesus gives them a firm and deeper understanding of the nature of the resurrected life. Jesus tells them that Heaven will be quite different and in our afterlife we too will be quite different. The resurrected life for example is the life of a completed human person no longer defined in marital or generative terms. Jesus explains to them that the Kingdom of God here on earth as well as the new and eternal Jerusalem in Heaven is both very different than our expectations. In other words, in the resurrection, when we are transformed at the twinkle of an eye, just like the angels of God, we will receive spiritual bodies that are incorruptible.

Again Jesus tells them that in this physical world, God has instituted marriage to fulfil his work of creation as he creates humanity in his image and likeness. But

once in Heaven, there will be the fulfilment of creation and thus there is no need of marriage. The resurrected life is not the kind of life we have here but a life fulfilled with our closeness to God. Jesus clearly affirms that those raised from the dead are no longer liable to death. Beside the joy of the beatific vision of God a person can rest assured that there will be no death any further and this happiness and joy will never end. In eternal life, those who have persevered to the end, they shall all enjoy the fullness of life as it was meant to be enjoyed from the beginning of creation. They shall be counted among the living, all sharing the same Father, the living God. To attain this Resurrection, we have to be with Jesus and experience his life. The presence of Jesus is the knowledge of the resurrection.

Since Sadducees held only the Law of Moses as their guide, Jesus returns to that, citing the remarkable incident of Moses encountering God in the burning bush. God calling out to Moses from the burning bush identifies himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. When Moses did encounter God, these Patriarchs were dead and gone. But we have the God who is God of the living persons and cannot be God of those dead. Yet God says to Moses that he is the God of those persons. That meant for certain that those persons were not dead in the divine sense but were still living. The creative power of God brings life after death. This argument put the Sadducees to silence and indeed Jesus had met them on their own ground and won the battle. Jesus also affirms the fact that all those who have proved themselves worthy while in this life will rise to an eternal life. In that life we will become like angels. We will not be pure spirits without bodies but we will be like them in that our bodies will become spiritual. They will lose all restrictions and limitations imposed on them now. They will not be subject to decay or corruption and cannot suffer any pain or sickness. For in the future life people are in a completely new relationship with God and with each other. Already in this life, Jesus has taught that to be in the Kingdom is to have entered a new relationship with others. In the Kingdom people have entered a new family where all irrespective of their origins are our brothers and sisters.

Jesus in his proper reply tells the people that the children of this world take wives and husbands, but those who are judged worthy of a place in the other world and in the resurrection from the dead do not marry because they can no longer die, for they are the same as the angels, and being children of the resurrection they are children of God. This is indeed a new life which is attained in Jesus. The presence of Jesus is the knowledge of the resurrection. To attain this Resurrection, we have to be with Jesus and experience his life. He tells us that whoever wishes to come after him must deny self, take up his cross and follow him. Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for his sake and that of the gospel will save it. This was very much a practical and sincere norm of life.

In its message the gospel tells us that our Christian life is based, first, on the firm hope that one day we will rise again and be perfectly united with the One from whom all things come and to whom all things are destined to return. It is put so well by Paul writing to the Romans: "We know that up to the present time all of creation groans with pain, like the pain of childbirth. But it is not just creation alone which groans; we who have the Spirit as the first of God's gifts also groan within ourselves as we wait for God to make us his sons and set our whole being free." He continues by clarifying what is meant by 'hope'. "For it was by hope that we were saved; but if we see what we hope for, then it is not really hope. Our hope is based on a deep faith and trust in a loving God as the Source and Goal of all living. This hope is a confidence of one day experiencing something which is at present beyond our grasp. One who is worthy of eternal life are those chosen by God and will not taste death. They will have happiness and joy as a share of their life. God will be their eternal reward.

One day a young lady was driving along with her father. They came upon a storm, and the young lady asked her father, "what should I do?" He said "keep driving". Cars began to pull over to the side, the storm was getting worse. "What should I do?" The young lady asked? "Keep driving," her father replied. On up a few feet, she noticed that eighteen wheelers were also pulling over. She told her dad, "I must pull over, I can barely see ahead. It is terrible, and everyone is pulling over!" Her father told her, "Don't give up, just keep driving!" Now the storm was terrible, but she never stopped driving, and soon she could see a little more clearly. After a couple of miles she was again on dry land, and the sun came out. Her father said, "Now you can pull over and get out." She said "But why now?" He said "When you get out, look back at all the people that gave up and are still in the storm. Because you never gave up your storm is now over.

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