

ECHOING GOD’S WORD
in
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time
November 6, 2022

Lectionary Readings:

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

Seven brothers give up their lives for resurrection.
God guards us against the evil one.
Jesus affirms the teaching on life after death.

Luke:

“Finally, the widow herself died!” I have always repressed a smile on my face whenever I have had to read this line from the Sunday Gospel. “Well, of course, she died! Who wouldn’t after having been married seven times!”

Sadducees were a religious group within Judaism who accepted only the first five books of the Bible, the Books of Moses, as inspired Scripture. Those books do not proclaim any belief in life after death. For example, in the Ten Commandments, the hoped-for reward for honoring one’s parents is that “you may live a long life in the land.” Life as they knew it in this world was the only life there was. Rewards and punishments were here below, as we would say today. Also absent from the Books of Moses was belief in angels, demons, etc. Only after the Exile in Babylon does Israel begin to develop an awareness of the spirit-world, a realm of existence that is not of the physical body. Life beyond the grave has to be a life of the spirit, what we call the soul. Only at the end will the body and soul be reunited in the general resurrection.

So, in the absence of belief in everlasting life, how was a person’s identity to survive? How could we be assured that we would live on in some way? Marriage and children, obviously, was the God-given process by which our lives would continue after we die. We could only live on in our descendants, our posterity, our children. Life continued on in those we passed our life on to. Hence, the very urgency of marriage and of having children. Sterility, of course, had to be seen as a curse from God. One would really be dead if he could not pass on life through having children. (The curse was always seen to be upon the woman since it was thought that only women were sterile. But the effect was on the husband, since it was his life and his identity, his name that needed to be passed on.)

So, the practice of “levirate marriage” had to be invented! (See Deuteronomy 25:5-10.) If my brother died without having had children, especially a male heir, it was my duty to take his wife for the purpose of producing an heir who would bear his name (not mine) even if I already had a wife and children of my own. The children born of this union were not my children; they were my brother’s children. It is interesting to note that the story of Onan (Genesis 38:1-11) rests on this very obligation to give posterity to one’s deceased brother. Onan hates his dead brother; he pretends to have intercourse with his sister-in-law, but “spills his seed on the ground,” so she will not conceive. He is punished by God for this sin (for hating his brother, not for ‘wasting seed’)!

The Sadducees try to make belief in life after death appear ridiculous: Would this woman have *seven* husbands? They are stuck in their material and physical interpretation of the belief in resurrection. They do not understand anything about the spiritual nature of the human person. Jesus

will have to teach them that in a state of spiritual existence there are no bodies; there is no sexual reproduction; there is no marriage as we know it in the physical realm.

Maccabees:

1 & 2 Maccabees are historical books concerning the period in which the Jews struggled to maintain their religious identity against the determined efforts of the Greek conquerors to wipe out this religion. The time is about 165 years Before the Common Era (175-164 B.C.E.). Although not included in the Hebrew Bible, these books have been valued by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches and are considered inspired Scripture. A woman and her seven sons are arrested and ordered to eat foods forbidden by Jewish law. Each of them prefers to die rather than violate the sacred trust of their God. They value life with God beyond the grave more highly than life in this world bought at the price of betraying God.

Thessalonians:

This disciple of Paul exhorts his fellow Christians in Thessalonika to be steadfast in their commitment to Jesus Christ. He asks them to pray that he and all ministers of the Gospel be delivered from evil and wicked people. We have here a piece of apocalyptic writing where great forces are arrayed one against the other, with an assurance that good will triumph by the power of God.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. With all the emphasis being placed on making the physical body strong, developed, beautiful, etc., why is it that there is so much violence directed against human beings: rape, torture, beatings, wars, etc. Since the physical stands at the core of all values, why is the human body not valued more, cared for, honored? Why do people abuse the body with drugs (alcohol and tobacco, too), overwork, little rest or real relaxation?

2. Do you value and look forward to heaven where we will enjoy the presence and the beauty of God with a happiness even beyond the deepest human expectation? Does the doctrine of the resurrection have any meaning for you? Do you long for the day when your earthly body will be transformed into glory, perfected for everlasting living and reunited with your soul? What does this all mean to you?

3. What does Jesus mean when he says that God is a God of the living, not of the dead? Do you see any evidence of this fact in the way the Christian people live? Do we value human life? Do we value spirituality? How come life can be treated so cheaply even by people who claim to believe in resurrection? How do you explain that some Christians, some Catholics, too, do not consider abortion to be a moral wrong?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Ask your family to join you in evaluating what they see on television from the point of view of identifying the violence, the abuse of humans, the destruction of property. Ask them to decide which shows they will no longer watch.

PRAYER

**Father, as your Son was raised on the cross,
his mother, Mary, stood by him, sharing his suffering.
May your Church be united with Christ in his suffering and death
and so come to share in his rising to new life.
He lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.
Amen.**

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

The doctrine concerning the resurrection from the dead may not appear, at first sight, to have much relevance to the daily lives of ordinary Christian people. We do not usually sit around discussing whether we will live beyond the grave. Most people are not eager to discuss the grave in the first place. As we walk down the street and look at the people we encounter, there does not seem to be any distinguishing characteristics of those who believe in the afterlife and those who do not.

However, it is a fact that belief in eternal life resides at the very heart of the Christian faith. Christian people find their faith in everlasting life rooted in the belief that Jesus Christ rose from death after he had died the redeeming death of the cross. According to his promise, all who believe in him will also rise from death. At its beginnings, the Church proclaimed this message which surely came as welcome good news to the people who labored under heavy burdens. Slaves, the poor, women, the oppressed of every kind heard the message of the Gospel with enthusiasm as they looked for a life that was better than what they were experiencing.

As death approaches, it is consoling for the soul to hear the prayer of the Church that accompanies those who are departing: “Go forth, Christian soul, from this world May you live in peace this day. May your home be with God in Zion, with Mary, the virgin Mother of God, with Joseph, and all the angels and saints...” In the Liturgy of Christian Burial, we celebrate the gifts of God in this world that prepared us for a life of glory with Christ. We recall our baptism in which we have already entered into death with Christ and have passed with him to life that will never end. From the day of our baptism, therefore, we already began to live of the power and mystery that will never end, the risen life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The resurrection of Jesus is celebrated in the Church not for its own sake but for our sake. It is a teaching that applies to us. Joined to him in the redeeming effect of the cross, our sins are forgiven and we are elevated by grace to a share in his divine life. The result is that the life that was given him in resurrection is shared with us, to be lived in the glory of the kingdom forever.

(See The Catechism: # 1020-1037)

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