

Homily
November 6, 2022
32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
29:01 – 40:03

Our opening prayer today for this liturgy seems to be at odds with what we witness, especially in Maccabees and in Jesus being confronted by duplicitous trickery. The opening prayer was this:

*Almighty and merciful God,
graciously keep from us all adversity,
so that, unhindered in mind and body alike,
we may pursue in freedom of heart
the things that are yours.*

We'll start with Maccabees. Second Maccabees is a companion to First Maccabees, of course. They were both written during a time of persecution in the middle of the second century before Jesus' birth. The persecution was this: Antiochus Epiphanes, a descendant of the generals of Alexander the Great, was consolidating his political power by conquering lands again – especially Egypt – to counter the Roman influence from the Republic. It was about politics and power. But as he conquered, he made sure or tried to make sure that he had one culture, one religion – period - to unite these diverse groups. It was an early version of ethnic cleansing, if you will. And he comes to the Jews in Palestine. He begins to make them become Greek and to set aside their religion for his religion.

The ones we hear about in this Second Maccabees, Chapter 7, are resisting. They weren't alone. There were many resisters.

What they are resisting is not just to eat pork; that was the presenting situation. Rather, to deny their connection to the Covenant of Moses, deny their connection to God as had been revealed to them and to their ancestors, and to worship false gods and to let go of all their connections to their ancestors in faith. What we hear is a refusal to do that by seven brothers and their mother.

Now, we only hear of three of them. But if you go and read all of Chapter 7, probably what you're going to do is go, "Eewww!" Because we hear of torture, floggings, tongues being cut out, hands being cut off, heads being cut off. It's pretty gruesome.

But what we see in these eight people is a profound belief in their God's hope. And that hope, as we heard, is centered in "Resurrection." Resurrection of the body. Resurrection beyond this life;

their spirit, which they wished to preserve before God and their body, renewed. Thus, they felt they could endure such awful torture. And they had hope. That was essential. They had hope.

The same plays out in the Gospel, but in a different way. We have seven brothers, again. And the seven brothers this time are being used as a tool by the Sadducees, who denied the Resurrection, to trick Jesus into making a bad statement about the Law. And thus, bringing condemnation upon himself.

There is deceit here. They're lying when they ask the question. It's a form of "verbal persecution" that Jesus is having to face. And again, like before, it's about the Law, the Law of Moses, the Covenant Law. Not just the "jot" and "tittle," you know, the little marks. Not just the simple or straightforward cautions that are in the Law, but rather the whole underpinning of it. And the religious leaders, the Sadducees who are in charge of the Temple, are using that Law in a deceitful way.

The wonder of it is that Jesus takes that very law and turns it upon them in a peaceful way. He says, "You're mistaken." Those who die and are in the Kingdom are not given in marriage, or married. That's not a part of the Kingdom in the next life.

And if you deny Resurrection, remember what Moses himself said. The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob – their spirits were there on Sinai. Their faith ancestry was drawn to him in the presence of God. Again Resurrection hope, the key to living through verbal and deceitful communication.

Thus my brothers and sisters, we actually have four parallel points in the two readings.

Persecution, torture or dissimulation,

Seven brothers,

The Law, the Covenant of Moses – how to live by it, how to use it rightly

And Resurrection hope

Powerful examples for us, which are echoed in the Second Reading so wonderfully. There the Thessalonians are encouraged to live out their covenant in Jesus in the same manner. Rooted in God's promise in Christ: Life, Death and Resurrection. And even for them, it wasn't going to be easy.

So, it is a little odd to have that opening prayer, isn't it? In one sense. "Graciously keep from us all adversity, so that unhindered in mind and body alike, we may pursue in freedom of heart the things that are yours."

But my brothers and sisters, our Resurrection hope is meant to get us through these challenging moments. It's meant to get us through the moments when our faith is attacked, or our own belief is attacked by someone. It's to help us through the moments when our bodies betray us, whether it's through disease or age. It's there to help us see beyond the present moment when our lives are in disarray. Or one of our children is kind of out on a limb, or a parent is in an Alzheimers world, into which we cannot enter.

We are to cling and live by the hope we have through the Resurrection, the promise of it. And know just as all of our members here, (motioning to banners with names) these many folks we've buried in this last year. We've prayed for them and given thanks for their being connected to such hope. And we know that we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses to that very hope, who gather here with us in prayer every time we gather. They all proclaim: believe, live by and know that whatever life brings you, ultimately its meaning rests here in that hope of the Resurrection which we need to call forward to ourselves every day.

The opening prayer is a prayer of hope, and yet it belies our reality. Let us rely on God's reality in Christ Jesus.