

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #156

READING I 2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14

A reading from the second Book of Maccabees

It happened that seven brothers with their mother were arrested and tortured with whips and scourges by the king, to force them to eat pork in violation of God's law. 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."

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."

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, 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."
Even the king and his attendants marveled at the young man's courage, because he regarded his sufferings as nothing. »

Maccabees = MAK-uh-beez

The opening words belie the gruesome nature of what follows, so begin with a weighty tone.

Don't rush past the violent language: "tortured"; "whips"; "scourges."

They have considered their decision and this brother speaks it for the rest.

The identification of this as the "second" brother is left out. "He" substitutes for "the second brother."

He mocks their ignorance.

The cruelty of the persecutors is reinforced by the use of the word "sport."

He makes three statements: Where he got them, his willingness to sacrifice them, and his conviction that they will be restored.

Convey the wonder of the king at the young man's courage.

READING I

Belief in the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead is at the very center of Christian faith. In the world of first-century Judaism, however, not all Jews believed even in the possibility of Resurrection. The Sadducees saw no evidence in the Torah for God raising the dead, while Pharisees had faith in the Resurrection of the just at the end of the ages. Much of the Old Testament reflects a belief that the reward of the just would be given to their descendants, with the after-life consisting of a shadowy existence in Sheol. One of the clearest testaments of

pre-Christian Jewish belief in the Resurrection is found in today's reading from Maccabees about seven brothers who are put to death. Written in a Hellenistic milieu in the second century before Christ, Maccabees reflects a development in some Jewish belief in the afterlife.

The story of the martyred brothers is filled with graphic details of torture, some of which are omitted from the lectionary. The harshness of the brothers' persecution brings their steadfastness into sharp focus, for they remain faithful to their tradition no matter what suffering they endure. The

motivation underlying their courage is their belief in the Resurrection of the dead. The first one to speak gives a clear statement of his belief. Though their tormentors are depriving them of this present life, the King of the world will raise them up to live again forever. The king who is persecuting them is not the King of the world; the Lord God of Israel, in whom the brothers and all faithful Jews put their trust, is a more powerful king who will give them life forever.

As the third brother is being cruelly tormented, he adds another dimension to their belief. Holding out his hands, he

Remember, you are speaking of four murders. Don't lose the weighty tone needed to relate this remarkable story.

His courage is rooted in his faith that he will rise again. His final comment reflects the conviction that evildoers would *not* rise from the dead.

For meditation and context:

Thessalonians = thes-uh-LOH-nee-uhnz

You begin with a prayer comprised of several phrases that communicate separate thoughts. Don't run them together.

"Good hope" refers to Christ's return at the end of time.

Invite your assembly to join the prayer Paul requests for the spread of the Gospel.

Don't make light of this sobering truth that there are those who work against the Gospel.

speaks of his hope that the God who gave him his hands will give them back to him. He believes that his body will be fully restored at the Resurrection. As yet another brother is being tortured, he affirms what all the brothers believe: hope that God will raise them up. He then adds that for those who are so maltreating them, there will be no Resurrection to life. The Maccabean belief in Resurrection of the body is not for the wicked, but only for the just.

READING II Early in Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians,

After he had died,
they tortured and maltreated the fourth brother
in the same way.

When he was near death, he said,
"It is my choice to die at the hands of men
with the hope God gives of being raised up by him;
but for you, there will be no Resurrection to life."

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 17:1, 5–6, 8, 15 (15b)

R. Lord, when your glory appears, my joy will be full.

Hear, O LORD, a just suit;
attend to my outcry;
hearken to my prayer from lips
without deceit.

Keep me as the apple of your eye,
hide me in the shadow of your wings.
But I in justice shall behold your face;
on waking I shall be content in
your presence.

My steps have been steadfast in your paths,
my feet have not faltered.

I call upon you, for you will answer me,
O God;
incline your ear to me; hear my word.

READING II 2 Thessalonians 2:16—3:5

A reading from the second Letter of Saint Paul to
the Thessalonians

Brothers and sisters:

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,
encourage your hearts and strengthen them
in every good deed and word.

Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us,
so that the word of the Lord may speed forward and be glorified,
as it did among you,
and that we may be delivered from perverse and wicked people,
for not all have faith.

he offers a prayer of thanksgiving to God, and he reiterates it midway through: "we ought to give thanks to God for you always, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord" (2:13). Today's reading adds other prayers: first Paul's prayer for the community, and then Paul asking that they pray for him. An atmosphere of prayer, rooted in God's steadfast and loving relationship with the community, permeates the entire letter.

There was good reason for Paul to emphasize prayer to the nascent Church. The Christians in Thessalonica were enduring persecution and needed hope as they

awaited the Lord Jesus' coming again (*parousia*). Paul's emphasis on prayer is a means of reminding the community that God's loving presence sustains them in the here and now, in the midst of their affliction. Paul prays that God will provide encouragement and strengthen them in every one of their good deeds and words.

Having prayed for the community, Paul then asks that they pray for him and his coworkers, so that the word of the Lord will speed forward and be glorified. Paul's prayer is thus not so much for himself as for the effectiveness of the word that he

God's faithfulness is a source of comfort!

These words are also true of your assembly.
Speak them sincerely.

With strong eye contact, you end with
another prayer directed at your listeners.

The parenthetical comment is the most
important information in the opening
sentence. There is no need to signal their
ulterior motives.

Their first statement sets the parameters for
the legal question.

"Now" signals the complications that make
the situation seemingly difficult to resolve.

With self-satisfaction, the Pharisee suggests
he's presented a nut too hard to crack!

Stress "seven" as if to remind Jesus not to
ignore the details of the story.
Jesus is not argumentative, for his teaching
is as much for the crowd as for the leaders.
His words paint a heavenly realm of serenity
and joy.

preaches. The word (the entirety of the
good news lived and proclaimed) is ener-
getic and dynamic, almost appearing to be
a person, as seen in the Hebrew tradition.

Underlying the prayers of Paul and the
community is God's fidelity and abiding
love. Having prayed that God strengthen
the community, Paul affirms confidently
that the Lord will indeed strengthen them
and guard them. Paul's confidence extends
to the community itself: "in the Lord" they
are presently following Paul's instructions
and will continue to do so. Paul's final
prayer is an appeal directly to the Lord to

But the Lord is faithful,
he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.
We are confident of you in the Lord that what we instruct you,
you are doing and will continue to do.
May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God
and to the endurance of Christ.

GOSPEL Luke 20:27-38

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

[Some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a Resurrection,
came forward] and put this question to Jesus, 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.*
Now there were seven brothers;
the first married a woman but died childless.
Then the second and the third married her,
and likewise all the seven died childless.
Finally the woman also died.
Now at the Resurrection whose wife will that woman be?
For all seven had been married to her."
[Jesus said to them,
"The children of this age marry and remarry;
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.
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. >>

order the hearts of the community so that
God's love and Christ's steadfastness may
be manifest in the believers in
Thessalonica.

GOSPEL After his extensive journey
with his disciples, Jesus
entered Jerusalem, where he immediately
faced opposition from the chief priests,
scribes, and leaders of the people. The var-
ious groups attempted to trap Jesus, pos-
ing questions, challenging his authority,
and seeking to put him to death. Today's
Gospel tells of the Sadducees who came

forward with a question designed to
embarrass Jesus. Addressing Jesus as
"teacher," perhaps sarcastically, they cite
Moses, a logical place to begin since their
belief was based on the Torah. According to
Moses, if a married man died childless, his
brother was required to marry the widow in
order to raise up descendants for his
brother. Having heirs was important for
economic and societal stability. Even more,
in the context of this episode, the "raising
up" of descendants was the means of a
person living on.