

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle C

II Maccabees 7: 1-2, 9-14

Ps 17:1, 5-6, 8, 15

II Thessalonians 2:16 - 3:5

Luke 20: 27-38

Joseph A. Genito, O.S.A.

Seven brothers and their mother chose to endure torture and death rather than to be false to their God. What kind of commitment, what kind of courage does that require? And surely one must ask, what kind of belief would empower these people to endure such atrocities before losing their lives? These martyrs trusted that life would be restored to them by God in a new and glorious way. They bravely stood up for their faith, believing that God would reward them far beyond whatever any earthly power could offer.

Jesus was asked an absurd question by the Sadducees regarding the Levirate law of producing heirs; his response was that we cannot compare this life to the next. We can know nothing about life after death other than what Jesus promises us. Jesus pointed out to the Sadducees that those who are deemed worthy will live forever, like the angels, in a spiritual state which we can neither comprehend nor explain. He underscores this by saying that our God is a God of the living, "for to him all are alive." Being alive in God is to witness to the truth that all we have and all we are comes from God, a gift we can not earn. Human laws and governments and institutions do not determine what is good and true and worthy; God has deemed all people to be worthy of his love.

These readings emphasize the importance of life – not solely existence, but the meaning and quality of life. In Maccabees, the martyrs declared that their lives would be meaningless if they were unfaithful to God. For them, this was the truth for which they existed, as it was for Jesus whose words attesting to truth often clashed with the authorities of his day like the Sadducees. In both cases, they refused to give in to the accepted actions of their day simply because authority required or demanded that they do so. They chose to stand fast with their deeper, spiritual values, to stand up for the truth.

Standing up for the truth entails a witness to faith in the face of losing one's comfort, one's social status and, perhaps, one's life. It is a belief that what we experience in this life is not the goal for which we were created, and so we do not settle for money or power or social status. We do not give in to those who have power to inconvenience or harm us. Yes, they can threaten us physically, ridicule us – even kill us, but they can never silence the power of our witness to the Gospel if we stand against what is wrong and stand for the truth.

So many people in recent history have been shining examples of standing up against injustices like the family in Maccabees. Think of Oscar Romero standing up to the military might of the power brokers in El Salvador who oppressed his people; think of Mother Teresa, standing

against the accepted social norms of a relatively comfortable convent life so that she could go out to minister to the poorest of the poor and proclaim loudly that they too were God's children, equally loved. Think of Dorothy Day, who stood for the truth of the dignity of each person, and stood in defiance of injustices inflicted upon the poor; think of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who stood as a beacon of truth against the power and tyranny of those who believed that some human beings were superior to others to the point of genocide. And think of the host of people who stood with Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Desmond Tutu, nonviolently opposing the socially accepted norms of apartheid and segregation.

There is no shortage of people who are standing up for the truth today, nameless people defying the power of those who deny the value of every human being and support oppressive measures which keep the poor in their place while the oppressors continue to enjoy wealth and power. These people, like the family in Maccabees, are standing up for the truth in solidarity with all who are victims of oppression in all its forms: genocide, racial discrimination, religious fanaticism, and the like. Standing up for the truth, these modern day prophets give up their personal comfort, personal gain, and some even give up their lives. They inspire us, they teach us, never to settle for the short-range gratification of comfort and pleasure, but to stand up in whatever ways we can, to witness to the greater truth of human dignity which propelled the family in the book of Maccabees, and which fueled Jesus in his everyday mission of preaching justice for the sake of the kingdom.

The second letter to the Thessalonians provides a fitting conclusion: "the Lord is faithful and will strengthen and guard you from the evil one. We are confident ... 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."