

Reflection for the 32th Sunday in Ordinary time, Cycle C

1st Reading: *2 Maccabees 7:1–2; 9-14*

Probably written in the late 2nd century before Christ and not written in Hebrew, this book is not included in the Hebrew Canon. The late theological themes include the author's teachings on Israel's sufferings (5:17–20; 6:12–17), the resurrection of the just on the last day (7:9, 11, 14, 23; 14:46), the intercession of the saints in heaven for people living on earth (15:11–16), and the power of the living to offer prayers and sacrifices for the dead (12:39–46). The selection we have today, the story of the seven sons, raises up belief in the resurrection.

2nd Reading: *2 Thessalonians 2:16–3:5*

This is the beginning of the closing of this short letter, even though it is followed by more instruction. This selection is a request for prayers and includes a prayer for the Thessalonian community.

Gospel: *Luke 20:27–38*

"...they are like angels; and they are the children of God because they are the ones who will rise." Lk

20:36

The Sadducees¹, as this Gospel selection points out, did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. For them, the experience of earthly life was all there was and salvation was to be seen in terms of being saved from the difficulties of this world. Maybe the signature saving event for them was being brought out of slavery in Egypt. This is not to deny the desire for personal salvation. People need to be saved from their enemies, from poverty, from bad luck, from sickness, etc. This bodes well with the concept of wealth and the good life being signs of God's favor. Their aristocratic lifestyle made sense with this understanding of life.

I hear undertones of ridicule in the question they put to Jesus. They are using an argumentative method common for Jewish thinkers in their day. Jesus responds using the same method and comes up with the direct opposite answer that their questioning implies. Luke 20:39, which immediately follows our selection, indicates that some of the scribes, the scholars of the law, were impressed with Jesus' answer.

So... Jesus bested the Sadducees. So what? Is this a rah, rah Jesus moment in the Gospels? The Sadducee party, though, didn't even survive the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. Why do I care about their argument anyway?

¹ The Sadducees were connected to the descendants of Zadok who was High Priest during the reign of David and Solomon. His decedents were the temple priests. After the Babylonian Captivity they became an aristocratic class out of which the Sadducean party developed. They accepted and worked with the civil rulers of their day and did not accept many of the teachings of the Pharisees including the oral law. The historian Josephus points out that they worked well with the wealthy but were not supported by the common Jewish people.

I don't think any of us care about their argument but I think many of us live as if their argument is right. Our modern society seems to be a "live for the moment" society with no view to the future, especially not to a future in the next life. We look for our salvation in the things of this world, in wealth, partying, power and prestige, as Thomas Aquinas pointed out. Of course, I'm being a little loose with his terms. He said wealth, pleasure, power and honor. We also seem to think that salvation is a this-worldly thing and use these classic substitutes for God to find it.

So, if we decide that we are not going to live like the Sadducees but be children of the resurrection instead, how are we supposed to act? Are we supposed to shun the things of this world? ...In a word, no... but we are not to look solely for salvation in the here and now; and, we are not to look for salvation in the things of this world.

We do want salvation from the difficulties of this world though, from oppression, from bullying, from violence, from poverty, from illness, from the results of mistakes we've made, etc. We want this-worldly salvation from many, many things and we pray for it. We should pray for it, but we should also recognize that the answer to those prayers doesn't bring us the fullness of life. And if our prayers aren't answered in the way we want, God is still there to lead us through our suffering to the experience of the fullness of life.

That's the trick. If we only want salvation in this world, and we want it on our terms, God can't do very much with us or for us. If we are willing to open ourselves to the salvation that is to come, and allow God to work with us in this life, preparing us for the salvation that is to come, then, and I think only then, can we experience the fullness of life that is to come. Only then, I think, can we experience the resurrection of the just.

The funny thing is, that when we give up our desire for salvation in this life and open ourselves to God preparing us for salvation in the world to come, then we experience that life in this world is truly better. We experience hints that salvation in the world to come is worth working towards. When we give up our desire for salvation in this world, we discover that life in this world is good and is a pointer to the salvation we will experience in the next.

If we only live for what we can get out of this world, whether we recognize it or not, our life is empty. Instead of salvation, we experience emptiness.

Reflection:

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. Lk 20:34-36

Question:

What words or phrases grabbed your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they grabbed your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

Alternative:

Reflect upon/share about what is most important in your life. How does what is important in your life on earth connect with your concept of eternal happiness. What can you change in your life here on earth to help begin to experience the promise of the age to come?

Verse by Verse

Lk 20:28 "...his brother must take the wife and raise up descendants..." | This teaching is found in Genesis 38:8 and Deuteronomy 25:5. It is ultimately designed for the survival of the family and of the tribe upon which Jewish society was originally based.

Lk 20:29 "...Now there were seven brothers..." | Seven is a whole number in Hebrew Scripture and signifies, here, a sufficiency or completeness.

Lk 20:36 "...for they are like angels..." | The simile here is simply that we will never die again. It does not mean we will be bodiless like angels as is indicated by the comment that we will rise.