

32nd Sunday in Ordinary time C/2007

As human beings, we all have some inborn instincts that push us to go on living even if we know that one day this life will come to an end. For instance, couples get married and have children in the hope that their children will survive them as parents. A businessman hopes that at least one of his children may continue the store he has founded. Former presidents and heads of State establish memorial libraries and write memories, not necessarily for fun, but rather so that their work may be remembered after them, and their thoughts serve the generations to come.

All this expresses a deep desire in each one of us: we all want to live, and to live for ever. Today's readings invite us to reflect on the reality of life after death and on the outcome of life with God in his kingdom. The first reading recalls the persecution the people of Israel went through under the reign of King Antiochus Epiphanes who tried to force the Jews to abandon their faith and to embrace the practices contrary to the Law of Moses. At that time, seven brothers and their mother were tortured and forced to eat pork in violation of God's law.

Instead of denying their faith, they accepted death. What is striking in the text is the fact that their courage to endure death comes from the conviction that, even if they die, God who has created them will give them life again and he will raise them up. If this family did not at all believe in the life after death, they would not have accepted to lose their life in the present world.

The hope of eternal life and the resurrection of the dead is the key point in the discussion between Jesus and the Sadducees in the Gospel. First of all, let us remember that the Sadducees were one of the important religious groups in Jewish society. Unlike the Pharisees, the Sadducees accepted as Scripture only the written Law of Moses and rejected the authority of oral tradition. In the same way, they did not accept the existence of the angels or the spirits; neither did they believe in the resurrection of the dead.

As they came to Jesus in order to question him, they certainly wanted to ridicule him about the resurrection of the dead by referring to the Mosaic Law on Levirate marriage (Deut 25, 5). This law states that if a man dies without children, his brother can marry the widow in order to give him an heir. Children born from such a marriage were considered children of the dead man. The case the Sadducees bring to Jesus is really complicated, because, if we accept the resurrection of the dead, then to whom shall the lady belong in the life after death, in so far as all seven brothers took her as wife?

The answer of Jesus is clear and without ambiguity: After death, there is no marriage; and, therefore, the question is not only useless, but also irrelevant. In fact, after death, those who are deemed worthy of God's kingdom can no longer die, for not only are they like angels and immortal, but they are no more subject to passions and human desires like earthly beings. They are the children of God, because they are the ones who will rise. They do not need marriage any more.

In other words, Jesus would like to tell the Sadducees that they are seriously wrong to represent the life after death just as the continuation of the present life with its passions and emotions or, in some way, as its improvement. Frankly, it is something completely new, a new life with God for an eternal happiness. That is why, for Jesus, there is no comparison between human life shared by all on earth, and the resurrection shared by those who are children of God in heaven.

In this perspective, death is not a break in our life, but an entrance into the proximity of God where there will be no more pain or suffering, no more tears, but a complete bliss in the presence of the One who has given us life, that is God. In the same way, the resurrection of the dead does not mean a reincarnation, but the beginning of a new history of our life with God in his kingdom.

All these claims are based on the fact that our God is not a God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive. If Moses called “Lord” the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and not of the dead, then God will continue to be so for all those who die in him. In other words, God is a living God; because he is a living God, he gives life to everything that lives in the world. Our own life is ours in so far as it is a participation in the life of God. We live because God shares his life with us. That is the very reason of our hope in the resurrection of the dead; namely, that our life being a divine life, it cannot but be eternal. God’s life, which is our very being, cannot die. As long as God lives, we will live with him.

Here lies the keystone of our faith in Jesus Christ; namely, the hope for eternal life. Because of that hope, each one of us is challenged to energize while on earth the life of God within us by living according to the spirit of Jesus, and not according to the standards of the world, so that at the end of our pilgrimage on earth we come to live eternally with God in his kingdom.

The faith in the resurrection sheds light on everything we do in this world, including our pains and sufferings in the present world. It modifies our whole way of looking at human existence and the problems of this world. That faith must be nourished and strengthened through our life of prayer. That is what St. Paul recommends in the second reading. In that sense, we have to pray continually for one another, encouraging and strengthening one another in every good deed and word. In the same way, anyone dedicating his life to the word of the Lord should be a person of prayer. In time of adversity and crisis, we have to pray so that we may be delivered from perverse and wicked people. Only prayer can keep us united with God, with serenity, calm and peace of mind until the last day of our life, where we will meet the Lord and will be raised to eternal life in his kingdom. That is the grace we have to ask in this celebration. May God bless all and each one of you in Jesus Christ!

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



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