

THIRTY SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME YEAR C (2010)
(2 Maccabees 7: 1-2, 9-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5; Luke 20:27-38)

THE HOLINESS OF LIFE HERE AND THE GLORY OF LIFE HEREAFTER

I recently heard a news report on the radio about the high life in the United Arab Emirates and especially in the cities of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. These oil-rich urban areas present quite a contrast between the filthy rich and the dirt poor. Many of the poor are immigrant workers from India and other impoverished countries. The wealthy in these cities are often ostentatious in their life-styles. The report said that in many restaurants and bars there, the well-off order drinks like chocolate milk shakes with sprinkles of real gold on top. Since I heard this story, I have learned that in our own country, there is a type of drink called Goldschlager which is liquor also sprinkled with gold on the top. Perhaps some of you have had this exotic drink. I have not been able to verify whether the Goldschlager gold is real or not; but if it is, this drink frankly sounds decadent to me. But in the United Arab Emirates, it is true gold. I guess that ingesting gold does not hurt you physiologically, but it seems unbelievably out of place in a world where millions go hungry every day.

The practice of drinking gold-sprinkled milkshakes and Goldschlager presents quite a contrast with the story in the first reading today (from the Second Book of Maccabees) where a Jewish Mom and her seven sons are tortured and killed because they refused to eat pork which their pagan conquerors, tried to make them do. They refused to eat what their religion forbids with the strong hope that God will reward them by raising them up to new life. Unlike the gold eaters of our crazy modern world, these Jews have their priorities straight. This reading, of course, fits in well with the theme for this Sunday's Scripture – the Resurrection from the Dead to live with God. Even drinking gold cannot compare with eternal life.

Today's gospel from St. Luke indeed invites us to reflect on the theme of Resurrection and the life of the world to come. In this passage, a faction of the Jews known as Sadducees comes forward to test Jesus. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection and were mortal enemies of the Pharisees who did believe in it – and, by the way, Jesus would have been considered a Pharisee – that is, a man devoted to Jewish law and tradition.

- So these enemies of Jesus, the Sadducees, try to trap him with the question about the woman who, because of a provision of Jewish law, had to marry seven brothers in succession as they died one after the other.
- My first thought is, "that poor woman who had to put up with seven husbands -- and who were brothers, no less."
- In Jesus' response to the question of who among the seven brothers will be this woman's husband in heaven, he says that his questioners do not understand what heaven is really like.
- Heaven is a place where we don't need the support of the institution of marriage as we do on earth.

- Heaven is where we will love each other as children of God and, in a sense, we will have a bond of charity with everyone.
- Of course, we will be happy to share eternal life with our earthly family, but the important thing will be to enjoy life with God who is love and who will enable us to have an intense and loving relationship with all who are saved and who have risen to new life in Christ.
- That first reading (from the Second Book of Maccabees) reminds us that what we do in this life will determine whether we will experience that Resurrection.
- The context for this reading from 2 Maccabees is the conquest of the Jewish people by one of the Greek kings who was a descendant of the generals who split up the Empire of Alexander the Great [356-323 B.C.] after his death in 323 BC.
- This conquest and oppression of the Jewish people occurred in the 2nd century B.C.
- Of course, the Greeks tried to impose their culture and religion on the Jews—and really tried to destroy the Jewish religion.
- In our reading, we see that this campaign to obliterate Judaism met with stiff resistance—including this heroic family of seven brothers who, along with their mother, endured torture and death rather than eat pork. If they had eaten pork, this of course would have been a symbolic denial of their Jewish faith.
- What these brothers and their Mom did was to uphold the moral and cultural values of their people—the Jews—who were the people of the one true God.
- These Jewish folk scoffed at earthly honors and put their trust in God who offers resurrection to eternal life.
- Of course, Christians (unlike Orthodox Jews) do not consider eating pork to be wrong.
- But that is not the point.
- The important thing is to listen to our consciences and to follow our hearts in doing what we know is God's will – according to the guidance that we have in our time and place from the church
- As we all know, the Catholic Church has a well-established tradition of strong values in support of life, justice, and peace. In a nutshell, Catholic values always center on the community – the People of God in the church and even the wider community. For Catholics, this means we really care about each other and especially the most vulnerable and weak among us. Catholic values have nothing in common with the “Jesus and me” mentality of some Christians. For Catholics, it is always “Jesus and we” – and it is this way of thinking that the Catechumens and Candidates sign on to today.
- Love is one and indivisible. We love God, neighbor, and self by staying morally clean and by our openness to the victims of abortion, injustice, poverty, war, and disease and those who have no health insurance. In the Catholic view, there is no division between personal moral values and social justice. They are a unity.

- So for us Catholics today, it is not a question of not eating pork (as it was for the Maccabees) but rather a question of respect for the absolute dignity of each human person, rich or poor, sick or well, born or unborn – no matter their race or ethnic background or religion.
- As we approach the end of the liturgical year, the Church invites us through the readings at Mass to reflect on our eternal destiny.
- And today, as we welcome these Catechumens and Candidates who will become Catholics next Easter, they give us the example of the need to grow daily in our faith and in our love of neighbor. Those we welcome in our church and parish today inspire us to deepen our own relationship with God through Jesus and to hope for eternal life which is the goal of every Christian.
- That eternal destiny will flow from how we live our life here on earth where golden milkshakes and Goldschlager have no place in the lives of Christians.
- May the example of the Jewish brothers and their mother in the Second Book of Maccabees inspire us to live heroic lives of devotion to God – lives worth living, lives that are careful about what we say and do and think and about what we eat and drink and wear (lives that are headed toward Resurrection and life with God)!