

Sunday, November 10, 2019

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: 2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14

Responsorial: Psalm 17:1, 5-6, 8, 15

2nd Reading: 2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5

Gospel: Luke 20:27-38

Our Hope Comes from the Resurrection to New Life in Christ

He is not God of the dead, but of the living. (Luke 20:38)

It's clear that the Sadducees were trying to trip up Jesus when they presented the hypothetical situation of a woman who was married to seven brothers over her lifetime. The Sadducees were an influential group who thought that their strict adherence to the first five books of the Bible (the Law of Moses) left no room for belief in the resurrection of the dead. They thought that presenting such a scenario to Jesus would stump him—and give them reason to accuse him of blasphemy.

But Jesus turned their question around and used it to affirm the promise of the resurrection. Those “deemed worthy . . . to the resurrection of the dead” won't be married in heaven, he told them. They will be like the angels—immortal (Luke 20:35, 36). Quoting from the Law of Moses, he said that God would not call himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob unless these patriarchs were also living (Exodus 3:6). He is God of the living, “for to him all are alive” (Luke 20:38).

This is indeed good news! Even though we will all one day experience physical death, we will still be alive to God. How could we not be? At our baptism, the immortal and eternal God came to live in us. When we are striving to live our faith, not even death can separate us from God. Someday, when Jesus comes again, he will raise our bodies to new life as well.

The more we hold fast to these truths, the less we will fear death. Rather than looking at it as an ending, we will view it more as a passageway into a new and better life.

This doesn't mean that we won't feel some apprehension or anxiety about dying. After all, we really don't know what heaven will be like. But we can choose to trust in God's promises. We can believe that if we follow the Lord today, our tomorrow will be brighter than we can possibly imagine.

“Jesus, thank you for destroying death so that I may live forever!”

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. The first reading from the Book of Maccabees begins with these words: *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. It includes these words spoken by the various brothers. "What do you expect to achieve by questioning us? We are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors." "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." "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."*
 - The Book of Maccabees tells the moving story of seven brothers and their mother who suffered torture and death rather than disobey one of God's laws. How would you describe the spiritual source of their courage?
 - In what way does your belief in the resurrection of believers to eternal life give you courage to stand up for your faith and for obedience to God's laws?
2. In the responsorial psalm, the psalmist speaks these words: *Hear, O LORD, a just suit; attend to my outcry; hearken to my prayer from lips without deceit. 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. 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.*
 - How would you describe the faith of the psalmist? In what way is the faith of the psalmist similar to the faith of the brothers in the first reading? In what ways are they different?
 - How does your faith compare to the brothers and the psalmist? Do you have an unshakeable faith that God will hear you and answer you when you turn to God your Father, or Jesus, when facing difficulties?? If not, why not?
3. The second reading opens with these words: *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. It ends with these words: 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.*
 - What message do you think St. Paul was trying to convey with his encouraging words?
 - How do you stay strong in your faith and these promises of God when facing tough situations?
 - Can you think of an example from your own life when God did indeed *encourage, strengthen, guard, and direct* you in the midst of a difficult trial?
4. In the Gospel reading, the Sadducees try to trap Jesus with a story about a woman who married seven brothers after each one died. Jesus, of course, confounds them with the clarity of his answer: *"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. ... he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive."*
 - What message do you think Jesus was trying to convey to the Sadducees with his story?
 - Is it consistent with your understanding of what you think heaven will be like? How is it different?
 - In what way can prayer and Scripture reading help us to gain some insights from God on the nature of heaven?
 - What steps can you take to remind yourself daily that God's plan, and the real purpose for your life, is to spend eternity with him in *the coming age*" in heaven?
5. The meditation is a reflection on the Gospel reading and these words from the reading: *He is not God of the dead, but of the living (Luke 20:38). It describes how Jesus is "God of the living, for to him all are alive (Luke 20:38). This is indeed good news! Even though we will all one day experience physical death, we will still be alive to God. ... When we are striving to live our faith, not even death can separate us from God." The meditation ends with these words: "This doesn't mean that we won't feel some apprehension or anxiety about dying. ... But we can choose to trust in God's promises. We can believe that if we follow the Lord today, our tomorrow will be brighter than we can possibly imagine."*
 - What does it mean to you that Jesus is "God of the living, for to him all are alive"?
 - Do you believe that by "striving to live our faith, not even death can separate us from God?" If not, why not?
 - How would you describe your "apprehension or anxiety about dying"? How do you handle them?

Take some time now to pray and thank the Lord that through his cross, nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39). Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as a starting point.

"Jesus, thank you for destroying death so that I may live forever!"

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization (www.christlife.org), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (www.nsc-chariscenter.org), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry.]