**THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY**

**6th November 2022**

**First Reading 2 Maccabees 7 vv. 1 - 2 & 9 - 14**

It could be said that Alexander the Great initiated the Hellenistic age with his victory over the Persians at Arbela in 331 B.C. After his death in 323 B.C. the Empire fragmented into four. (Daniel 7;6 could describe this schism)

Palestine was governed by the Syrian fragment where in 175 B.C. a particularly crude and tactless descendant of Alexander came to power through murderous violence. Antiochus Epiphanes tried to enforce Hellenization without any regard for Jewish sensibilities. He arbitrarily nominated a sycophant to be the High Priest in Jerusalem. A few Jews, mainly those of the urban upper class, supported him. They wished to dispense with Jewish law and to adopt a Greek lifestyle. However, fanatical opposition was organised by the Maccabean family and our passage records a typical incident of resistance. The second book of Maccabees, written in Greek, deals with the dramatic events of 176-160 B.C.

The historical period is significant because for the first time, it considers the possibility of life after death. In Hebrew mythology Sheol had always been the place where the dead go to a semi-conscious echo of life on earth. Now, the Jews killed in battle while upholding the law were martyrs and deserved recognition, and those who had sinned needed absolution. (2 Maccabees 12;38-45) (Sheol is the Hebrew and Hades the Greek for *the place where the dead are*)

This new Jewish hope was not merely for the resuscitation of the earthly body and a prolongation of this present earthly existence, but of translation into an entirely new mode of existence. This existence transcends our present life to such a degree that it can only be spoken of by means of inadequate symbols (white robes, shining like stars, being like angels) or, in Paul, as existence in a "spiritual body."

**Responsorial Psalm: 16:1, 5-6, 8, 15**

This psalm is a personal lament. The psalmist is in distress; he cries out for vindication and ends on a note of confidence. The phrase “when I awake” sounds to us like a resurrection, but it is doubtful that that is what the psalmist meant. He probably meant no more than the confidence that his faith would overcome his distress before death. But when read alongside the first reading, the psalm acquires a greater depth of meaning. The earlier part becomes the prayer of the martyrs for vindication, and the latter a longing for the presence of the Lord.

**Reading II: 2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5**

This lection concludes the main body of Paul’s letter and begins the conclusion. This section is introduced with Paul's appeal for the prayers of the congregation (3:1-2) and an expression of confidence that God will enable the Thessalonians to grow in grace (3:3-5). This section concludes next week.

Paul was writing to a congregation who had experienced hostility from the first preaching of the gospel (1 Thessalonians 2:14-15; Acts 17:1-9). It is against this background of oppression and persecution that Paul writes his message of hope.

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**Gospel: Luke 20:27-38**

The Sadducees were a small influential band of Jews who accepted only the Mosaic scriptures as authoritative. They rejected all later writing (such as our first reading) and revelation which, for them, concluded with the death of Moses. They thus denied all development in doctrine, such as the existence of angels or spirits. The long form of the gospel reading spells out the question in full. It was an attempt by the Sadducees to ridicule the idea of life after death.

(see Acts 23:8 – The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, or angel, or spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge all three.)

Jesus' answer makes two points about the new life he embodies. Firstly, resurrection is not simply our present earthly life prolonged, but an entirely new kind of existence, in which marriage is unknown. Since in the new life there is no more death, there is no need for marriage to perpetuate the human race (this explanation is unique to Luke).

The second point in Jesus' answer is that relevant passages in the five books of Moses, (Pentateuch), do not make the resurrection absurd, but are fully consistent with such a hope. In the incident where God addresses Moses from the heart of the eternally burning bush, (Exodus 3;1-6) he speaks of his subjects, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the present tense, as if they are still alive even six hundred years after their deaths. This argument may have been convincing to Jesus' contemporaries even though it seems weak to us.

The first point deals with the subject of a return to a form of life after death. The second point really answers an entirely different question, namely, one about immortality. The first was a Jewish question while the second was a more Hellenistic idea of a life disconnected from an earthly body. To distinguish between body, soul and spirit would have been incomprehensible to Jewish thinkers but it seems that the two different traditions have been combined somewhere along the line. The heart of the matter is that the Christian hope depends, not upon wishful thinking, but upon the very nature of the God we believe in.

The Jewish God, YHWH, has revealed himself in Jewish history as essentially the God of the living. Through his activity he enters into a personal relationship with human beings, and that relationship—God being the kind of God that he is, cannot be destroyed, even by death.

Unlike the preceding questions in Luke (20:1-8 and through to Chapter 26), the query of the Sadducees (vv. 27-28) is not concerned with the authority of Jesus or with his attitude to Rome; the issues it raises are religious and theological. Even so, the motives of the questioners are no better.

The question (v. 28) is based on the law of Levirate marriage (a law which was no longer in force.) The provision of levirate (from the Latin *levir* = brother-in-law) was that if a man died childless, his surviving brother was expected to marry the widow and the first-born son of this union was legally regarded as the son and heir of the deceased (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).

Doubtless this (vv. 29-33) was a stock question amongst Sadducees, designed to ridicule the idea of bodily resurrection from the dead.

At the beginning of the second paragraph in the Missal, Luke emphasises the difference between 'those who belong to this age' (who take wives and marry) and 'those who are judged worthy of a place in the other age and in the resurrection from the dead' (and who do not marry).

The reason for this is indicated in v. 36 - marriage is unnecessary because no-one will die. Luke restricts marriage to this present age in contrast to the world of the resurrection where no such state exists. Despite its human importance, marriage is of this world and will cease with its passing. It must be said that this idea is unique to Luke and has no support in the rest of the New Testament.