

**32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time**

Cycle C, 11.6.16

2 Macabees 7:1-2,9-14; 2 Thess 2:16-3:5;

Luke 20:27-28

**LIGHT AT THE END  
OF THE TUNNEL**

For years it was my favorite movie -- *Harold and Maude*. It wasn't a very conventional film: a love story between a twenty-year old kid and an eighty-year old woman. However, with its wonderful musical score by Cat Stevens and terrific acting by Ruth Gordon, it became quite a rage. Harold, the twenty-year old introvert with a gaunt and sinister look, a morbid and depressed spirit, had a fondness for death. The first half of the movie showed him faking various means of suicide to terrorize his mother. Of course, if she were your mother, you would have tried to terrorize her too. Domineering and self-serving, she exhibited not an ounce of love or authentic interest in her son's well-being. She was unfazed by Harold's antics, designed to shock her.



Harold encounters Maude in the last pew of a church during a funeral. (They attend funerals frequently: he, to feed his morbid ego; she, to remind herself of her ultimate destiny.) The years have taken their toll and she's as wrinkled as a prune. A little wisp of a woman -- however, her spirit is as sprightly as if she were a child of seven. "*Pfsst! Pfsst!*" Some of the worshipers frown and glare at the two. "*I see you at a*

*lot of funerals,*" Maude says to Harold as she pushes her way into his pew. "*You like them too, don't you? Really make you appreciate the mystery of life -- the great cycle of birth, life, death and re-birth. I feel so alive when I come to a funeral.*" Harold winces. After the procession leaves the church [they awkwardly try to look pious and somber as the priest passes their pew], they tag along at the end of the funeral cortege. The mourners wind their way in the rainy procession to the cemetery. The camera's aerial view shows the tops of all the black umbrellas, except for the last one -- Maude's bright yellow parasol, which she's twirling gaily over her shoulder. That unlikely two-some portray a delightful contrast in people's approach to death... and life. Some, like Harold, grow old before their time. Trapped by their circumstances they can't wait for life to be "over and done with." For them, each day is a prison sentence and death is 'release' from this torture chamber. Never having found a reason to live beyond the narrow confines of their own needs and desires, life itself becomes a coffin with the lid quickly closing upon them. Their fate is nothing more than waiting for the burial rites.

Others, like Maude, see life as something bigger than themselves. They know that they're here "for a good time, not a long time" as a song once sang. They can take a 'devil-may-care' attitude toward themselves and towards life because they believe that God cares and will always be there for them. They don't dread the "end" because, for them, it's merely one more adventure -- perhaps the greatest adventure. Death is the chance to break out of the limitations of this world. It may lead to extinction, but it may also be a passageway into a richer, a more satisfying experience.

In the words of the Apostle's Creed, you and I profess faith in "the resurrection of the body and life everlasting." We end

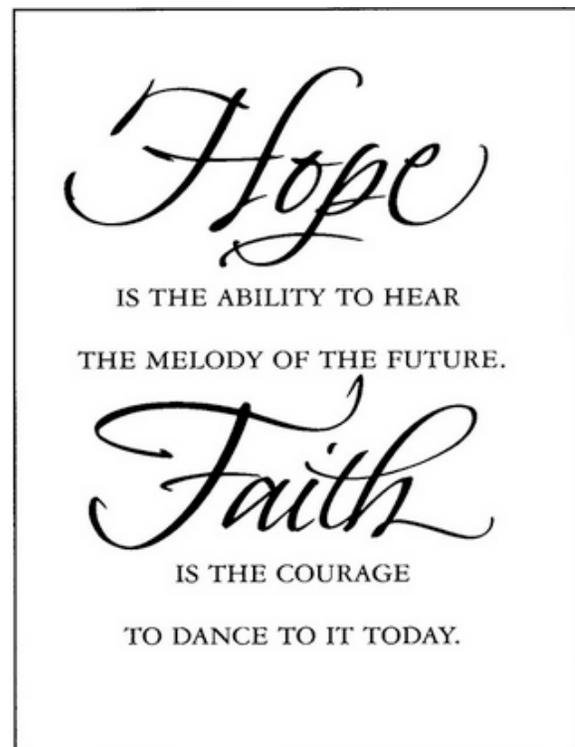
most of our liturgical prayers with a sense of eternity, like “forever and ever. Amen” or “world without end. Amen.” We pray for the dead, inscribe their names into a book, and honor their memory. Yet, for all our openness about death in prayer and theology, in media and literature, our society still attempts to anesthetize us to its reality, to turn our faces from our own mortality. And so we daily encounter a world that avoids the inevitable -- where doctors and nurses, even in a hospital, either refuse or are ill-equipped to discuss death with their patients; where the aged are shelved in the background instead of being recognized as the sources of wisdom and stability that they are; a society which promotes any means -- advertising, sales, recreation, cosmetics -- to maintain a facade of eternal youth -- not a youthful spirit, but a cover-up for the fact that life itself tends toward death.

Even our Catholic religion has often succumbed to a mythology about death with gruesome images from Dante’s *Inferno*, or prayers addressing God as an unrelenting judge. All these blind us to the divine lover and compassionate parent which scriptures reveal God to be. How then can we, as believers, face death, and how can our traditional belief in the afterlife and the resurrection help us to live each day more fully? The Word of God today has something to offer to the Harolds and Maudes among us and within each of us.

First, the Book of Macabees challenges us to have **courage in the face of struggle**. The seven brothers and their mother went to their death proclaiming unwavering faith in the God of Israel. Death no longer wields the final blow; it can truly become a passage to a fuller life. G. K. Chesterton once said of our Catholic faith that we believe life is too important ever to be anything but life. That life which is in us survives the tragic breaking apart that comes with death. And if God is with us in that

final moment, surely the daily struggles and trials that we face can be lightened when we face them against the background of eternity.

Second, St. Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians, assures us that we are people who hear **the melody of the future**. We can plan for the future -- a new job or a new home, our children’s security, a more just social order, a spirit of greater change and renewal in the church, a fresh approach to government and leadership (even in the face of this week’s election) -- because we know that God will not fail us. Our hopes will not be dashed. We work with hope for a better tomorrow because we are absolutely convinced that God will fulfill promises and act on our behalf.



Finally, the gospel of Luke today exhorts us to be dedicated to **living fully ‘in the present.’** Just as Jesus would not be trapped by the Sadducees who tried to distract themselves from the real issues, so we need not become confused or enmeshed in the “how” of life after death. Concern over how things shall be in heaven shouldn’t

detract from our present commitments. The belief in the hereafter begins through the love expressed here and now. The bonds of love that we foster and nourish each day, the causes of justice and peace that we uphold, the community of caring hearts that we build on earth are the surest and clearest testimony of the glory of a kingdom yet to come. Jesus didn't say: "It" is the resurrection or "There" is the resurrection. He said: "I" am the resurrection. Our faith in the resurrection is confident love in the person of Jesus Christ and committed union with his body, the Church. As Christians we are **hopeful** people, for this life and for more.



By the way, in the movie Harold finally learned how to live. Maude became his 'angel of mercy' who showed him what it meant to let go and soak this life for everything it has to offer. Maude died at the end -- we all must! And Harold cried to see her go -- we all hate to lose a loved one! But his sadness and his broken heart were sure signs that his life was now worth living. Once Maude brought him to life, he was able to put more of himself into each day of living. Maude taught him how to love and he was able to see in her death a passageway to something more. A beautiful movie and a touching story that echoes our story in Jesus: in his death and resurrection is our passage to new life. As Jesus tells us: *Our God is the God, not of the dead but of the living; for to God all are alive.*

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