

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

In today's first reading, as well as in the Gospel today, we hear about sets of seven brothers. I have a special interest in these two readings, because I am the youngest of seven brothers. You may remember the old movie, "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers", but there aren't too many of us around anymore. Just ask the Bischoffs.

In any case, let's look at the readings. In Maccabees, we see the brothers are faced with a choice; be tortured to death.... Or eat bacon. It sounds silly put that way, so let's look at what's really happening here.

The book of Maccabees was written in a tough time of the Jewish History. It was after Alexander the Great had conquered all of, the then known civilized World, from Sicily to Egypt to India. It was Most of the Mediterranean world, and beyond, which of course included Israel. The entire World was being Hellenized, and that included religion. As a sign of unity, synagogues were being replaced with gymnasiums. The Jews were encouraged to forget the archaic ways of their ancestors and Get with it, and take on the ways of the Modern World.

In today's reading, a widow and her seven sons are being encouraged to forsake the old ways. We are given a glimpse of that cruel encouragement. If you check this chapter out in your Bibles, it goes into even greater graphic detail. Today we heard about 4 of the brothers, but the torture gets even worse with numbers 5, 6, and 7, as men are dismembered.

This pericope has always been special to me, being the seventh son, and as each of the brothers is killed more cruelly.... I wonder if I could have stood so fast in my convictions.

And then in the Gospel, we hear about Seven more brothers. Seven Brothers who all marry the same woman. Now, this law sounds somewhat silly to us today as well. But in Ancient Israel, women had no rights. Not even to own property. So, if a woman was widowed without a son, she was destined for poverty. Raising up a son was the only way to hold onto anything that today we would see as rightfully hers.

But, Jesus makes all of this a moot point, because-- at the resurrection.... we're all different. We are like angels; and can no longer die. We can't begin to know how-- we can't even fathom in our little minds what it will be like. As St. Paul tells the Corinthians, No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man even conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.

And that's the whole point of the reading from Maccabees as well. The grueling torture and death of the brothers is not really the point of the story. It's all about the resurrection. No matter what the Great King does to the widow and her seven sons... they believe they will be somehow renewed in the Resurrection with God, so ..Come on King!!! Give 'em your best shot... you can't harm their immortality.

And what about US?

Well... We don't need a Hellenistic Bully to brutally rip our limbs from our torso. The King of this earthy life (death) is busy at work in us already. Our arms may not be cut off, but as we get older, we lose strength.

Our legs may be intact, but chances are, someday we'll use a cane, or one of those motorized chairs.

Yes, death is at work in US as surely as it was in the seven sons.

So, how do we face it? Whining and cowering... or are we confident that, "the TRUE king of the world will raise us up to live again forever?"

Do we believe that, "It was from heaven that we received these bodies; and for HIM do we hope to receive them again?" Do we live and DIE.... in the hope of being raised up?

Do we believe that if we share in the Body and blood of Christ given to us from this altar, we will have a share in his resurrected eternal body as well?

If we do, we can endure the cruel torture of aging and say with St. Paul, when the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality...

Oh Death.... Where is thy victory?

Oh Death..... Where is thy STING!!!!!!?