

Homily

32nd Sunday OT - C

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski

November 05-06, 2022

2 Mc 7: 1-2, 9-14

Ps 17: 1, 5-6, 8, 15

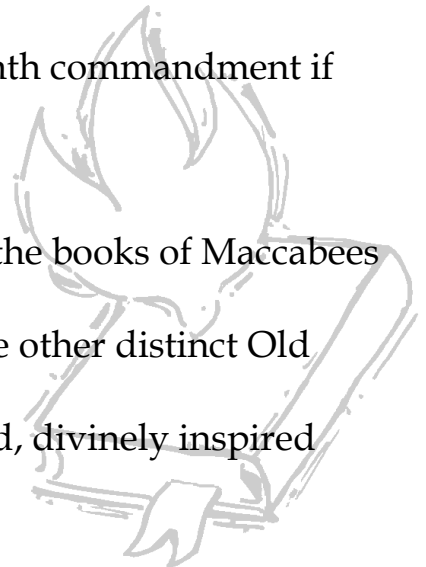
2 Thes 2: 16 - 3: 5

Lk 20: 27-38

So on Saturday night, my lector for the evening Mass asked me where she could find the Second Book of Maccabees in her bible, let alone the first. It seems that either someone had ripped the books of Maccabees from her bible or the books were not included in her edition.

That said, I pulled out a bible from the church sacristy to locate the books of Maccabees for her, only to find out that the books were not found in my bible, either. It seems that someone placed a *New International Version* of the Bible in our sacristy, affixed with a stamp from one of our neighboring Lutheran Churches. I guess I'll have to return the book to the Lutheran Church this week, lest I be accused of breaking the seventh commandment (or the eighth commandment if you are a good Lutheran... don't ask).

It was then I instructed my lector friend that the books of Maccabees are two of seven specific books (along with some other distinct Old Testament writings) that are *not* considered valid, divinely inspired



books by our Jewish or Protestant brethren. Their claim, in part, was that these texts were never actually written in Hebrew (the language of the Chosen People) but Greek instead. Thus, our Protestant and Jewish friends would call these seven books and such “hidden” or “apocryphal” books that are not divinely inspired – they are interesting to read but not valid books of the bible.

By the way, in my University Class I teach the students these seven special books in the bible which the Catholic faith calls “Deutero-Canonical” or “Second Canon.” I get the kids to learn the Deutero-Canonical books by using a memory trick that comes in handy. Thus, if you want to learn the seven extra books found in a Catholic bible, learn this phrase well: “Eating **M&Ms** on the **Joliet Township BUUS**” [1 & 2 Maccabees, Judith, Tobit, Baruch, Wisdom (double “u”s) and Sirach].

This discussion continued between the Catholic Church and those of the Jewish and Protestant faith right up to the time of the Council of Trent (1546-1563), when the bishops of Trent definitively wrote that the bible consisted of seventy-three books (including these seven texts and such). Anyone who did not agree with this, then let them be

excommunicated (or in Latin, *anathema sit*). I've decided that if I ever get another dog, I want to name him "Anathema" so that when I train him, I could say, "Anathema... *sit*" (and now you know why I shouldn't write my homilies in the middle of the night!).

The story of the Maccabees is an interesting one, though. At the time this story had taken place, the Jewish faithful had returned to the Promised Land and had lived there comfortably for a good 350 years or so. The Chosen People endured the tyranny of the Assyrians and the Babylonians, they lived under the blanket of protection of the Persians and all seemed well. However, in the early Second Century BC or thereabouts, the Greeks had overtaken the land where the Jews lived and had brought their Greek influences with them.

Now these influences were actually pretty good for the Jewish folk – not only was the Greek language introduced to the faithful Jews but they also enjoyed the benefits of Greek architecture, good Greek food and enhanced their religion with the concept of Greek philosophy. Especially with the latter, this added layer onto the religious life drew the faithful people even deeper into their relationship with God, paving

the way for the philosophers after Christ starting with St. Justin to offer great thoughts of introspection about the faith.

The bad part about the Greek invasion, though, was that some Greek leaders would force the Jews to conform to their laws which were contrary to the Jewish way of life and if the Jewish faithful did not follow the Greek way, they would be subjected to dire consequences. Take the mother with seven children in today's reading from 2 Maccabees. The Greek leader, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, subjected the Jewish folks to cruel tyranny and, in this particular story, forced Jewish families to eat food from the pig, which was (and is) expressly forbidden in Jewish law.

The mother and her children, extremely devout in their faith, would not relent to the king's wishes, and so one by one each member of the family was killed mercilessly with the mother looking on. Each child was more defiant than the next unless at last, the mother standing alone, remained faithful to a belief system that she considered sacred, even if it meant that she would be killed for it.

Our gospel reading parallels this challenge of the faith, as the leaders of the Sadducees (a group who did not believe in the resurrection from the dead) attempted to confound our Lord with a nonsensical riddle for a person of faith. Jesus' response to the Pharisees focused on the faith of the individual which would carry them to an existence in heaven incomprehensible to those who cannot believe, a heaven that consists of those who live good and faithful lives and wish to gaze into the face of God surrounded by like-believing people.

When I looked at today's readings and reflected on them this week, three thoughts crossed my mind that I wanted to share with you during this homily. The first was that regardless of another person's disposition, race, color, creed, religion or any other distinction that would make the person different than me, that I am obligated out of God's love to treat that person as a brother or a sister. As Jesus would elevate the status of women to that of an equal in the gospels (women were considered not much more than property in the Middle Eastern First Century), as St. Paul elevated the slave Onesimus as an equal to

him, so we are called to elevate every person we meet as an equal in our own lives.

The second point for me focused on the parameters God sets in my life. God has given me the commandments and the precepts of faith. God has presented his will through these scriptures we read, from the solid interpretations of these scriptures (we call that “sacred tradition”) and we are given a group of bishops who serve as teachers or magisters who direct us in the manner in which we should live. If I have the strength of that mother and her seven children, if I, too, can be strong enough to withstand the evils of the world that fall upon me on a constant basis, it is then that my heart is open to accept the presence of God in my life unconditionally.

The third lesson I learned this week from the readings focused on the kingdom of heaven, the “eternal Jerusalem” that those of the New Testament faith seek within our lives. If we are strong in our faith, if we accept everyone as a brother and/or sister, if we live a Christian life that focuses on a love infused with God’s presence, then what awaits us in heaven is greater than anything we could ever imagine.

I suspect that most in our world do not think much about the life of heaven in their lives because they are too busy investing in a disposable world whose history often becomes forgotten and irrelevant as we push forward to seek out new and exciting ways to experience life. If we actually STOPPED and contemplated about the life of heaven and what is required to reach this eternal Jerusalem, if we realized that whatever heaven offers us exponentially is more satisfying than anything on earth, we would probably invest ourselves a great deal more in this relationship with God than we currently do.

For this reason, I suspect that many people do not comprehend or appreciate the sacrifice made by this family from Second Maccabees. I suspect that those from the outside hearing this story might consider the family in question not very prudent or even intelligent, since they chose to forfeit their lives on earth rather than giving in to a ruthless king. And I guess that is the difference between those who have faith and those who don't - those who don't keep seeking for something that cannot satisfy what they seek and those who have need not seek for something at all, for what they have found is called an eternal life.

What do we seek in life? What are we willing to do to preserve the gift of faith that we have received? I don't know about you, but when I seek all these kids who are packing our church at Sunday Masses during our Religious Education sessions, the sensation of God's grace I feel in this Church cannot be replicated in material things. These kids around us remind me often about the type of faith that I wish to seek, the innocent faith of a child who does not distinguish between religions or cultures because everyone they encounter in the sandbox is considered a friend.

Last week, our money counters were so uplifted by these kids, who for the first time this year placed their offertory envelopes in the collection basket. For the money counters at our parish, what the kids gave was not so relevant to them (although the kids donated over \$180 to the Church last week - yea kids!!!). For the counters, what they didn't realize until Monday morning was that the kids were instructed to write on the envelopes how they utilize their time and talent in our Church and family.

What the kids wrote on those envelopes was so precious and so uplifting that the counters asked if we could include some of the kids' good deeds in our parish bulletin every so often, which I am most happy to do. When we see how the kids of our society live this life of faith in such an innocent way, it serves as an example for us to live the same way.

May we learn the lesson of due diligence to the faith, realizing that a faith well-lived serves as a precursor to an eternal life that those without faith can never understand. Let us live this life well, let us live it under the umbrella of God's protection and let us share this life with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.