
WORD MADE FLESH

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Resurrection to Life*

2 Maccabees 7:1-2,9-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-3,5; Luke 20:27-38

A golden string of images of resurrection.

In Maccabees we hear the story of the persecution under King Antiochus, the appalling systematic execution of three brothers. We hear that the brothers were required (as was the whole Jewish community) to "partake of unlawful swine's flesh." They were required by law and the political and cultural climate of their day to let go of their spiritual disciplines. They must forsake the pathways of their relationship with the holy One. Each brother took up the cross and when the third one was near death, he said to his torturers that he cherished "the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you, there will be no resurrection to life."

Our first image: the hope of resurrection to life. When we deal in death, in destroying life and the pathways to the Lord of life, we pollute our own hope for life itself. We are abandoned to each historical moment and our ability to make that moment in our own image. A separation invades our own sense of life, placing us, in the very moment of our apparent victory, in the land of death.

The Apostle Paul in Thessalonians is writing a letter of encouragement to the fledgling Christian community. It is simple encouragement and absolutely necessary: that they direct their hearts to the love of God and not fall into death dealing.

Our second image: the hope that we may live the resurrection in life. We are called to struggle to live the presence of God's love. As with all our fellows in the world we will experience the trauma wrought by those who deal evil and death to us. But that is not the grave issue here. Rather, the grave issue is that we may have the strength to continue to do the works of mercy and love in the world, that we will be steadfast in Christ, despite the work of evil visited upon us.

Today's Gospel presents us with a common ruse: the posing of a theological problem without any understanding of the meaning of the idea. The Sadducees we know, had no real feel for the significance of the hope of resurrection. While I do not know how this came about it is common to reject a religious idea for good reasons. Perhaps the Sadducees had seen, as is far too often in our own day, that the belief in resurrection - as a description confined to the after-life - is used against this life. It becomes the excuse for not living the resurrection in the midst of our suffering world. Jesus is alert to what lay behind the question and points to our need to be a child of resurrection now. Moses lived present to the divine and thus knew God as the God of life -- not of death. So, the Master tells us, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachael binds all who are in divine friendship with life. The resurrection is present in all who love the Eternal.

Our third image: that our resurrection, in this life, transforms all experience into that which is life-giving.

Death is conquered across the chasm of time precisely because the resurrection is at the centre of the life of this world.

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