

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

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

### **First reading:**

(2 Maccabees 7.1-2, 9-14)

*Rising to New Life*

This is the only reading from the Books of Maccabees in the Sunday cycle of readings. In the year 167 BC the Syrian Empire dominated Palestine, and King Antiochus IV decided to make an important step towards unifying his empire by wiping out the singular worship and religious customs of the Jews. He met stronger resistance than expected, and a great persecution was necessary. The resistance was led by three brothers who were given the name 'Maccabee' or 'Hammer'; they give their name to these two biblical Books (and also to an excellent beer in Israel!). Our reading gives one incident in that persecution.

The lasting importance of such a heroic stance was the development of the doctrine of Resurrection to new life. Until that time, Israel had seen the dead confined to Sheol, a wretched half-life, where the dead had no strength and could not even praise God. Now they saw that God would raise up to new life those who had died for their faith in the persecution. By the time of Jesus, this belief in the Resurrection of the dead to new life was standard in Israel. Only the traditionalist Sadducees did not accept it.

### **Question:**

*How different would your life be if there were no Resurrection?*

### **Second reading:**

(2 Thessalonians 2.16-3.5)

*The Second Coming of Christ*

A reading from Thessalonians heralds the end of the liturgical year, for Year A ends with 1 Thessalonians and Year C with this second letter. Both letters are concerned with the Second Coming of Christ at the end of time.

The little community at Thessalonika were worried. Paul had taught them that Christ had conquered death: for those baptized into Christ, death was no more. But then Christians had died! So Paul wrote to them that Christ would soon come in a triumphal procession, bringing with him his followers who had already died. This must have thrown the Thessalonians into a frenzy of excitement at such an imminent Coming, for Paul writes to them this second letter to calm them, explaining that the Coming is not so utterly imminent. They must continue to live life in the world, for there must first be a period in which evil is still at work, a period in which the Word of the Lord is still spreading, as it is among them, and in which they need protection from evil (or the Evil One).

The Christian cannot opt out of the world, so needs the strength of the Lord to live the ways of the Lord in a world which fundamentally fails to recognize such ways.

### **Question:**

*What is meant by 'the forces of evil'?*

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## **Gospel:**

*(Luke 20.27-38)*

### *The Sadducees' Riddle*

Since they did not believe in the Resurrection or any sort of life after death, the Sadducees are trying to make fun of Jesus. By the Levirate Law of Judaism, if I marry and die without begetting a son, my nearest male relative is bound to marry my widow and raise up a son in my name to carry on my line. The Sadducees' neat mockery is to ask what happens if this is repeated seven times (and worse than that, for the perfect number 'seven' means 'ad infinitum').

Jesus, again with typical neatness, turns their argument by returning to this fundamental text of scripture, God's reply to Moses at the Burning Bush. Not only is this in the present tense, 'I am (still) the God of patriarchs long dead', but it is the fundamental text that guarantees God's rescue and protection to his people through thick and thin.

This is one more instance of Jesus' deep control of scripture, of the way he passes over the flippant and superficial arguments of his opponents to penetrate to the basic sense of scripture. To God, no one is 'dead and gone', but we all remain safe in his hands.

## **Question:**

*Do Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have any advantage over me? If so, how?*

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