

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)  
(2Maccabees 7:1-2.9-14 / Luke 20:27-38)  
06.11.2016  
*Death & Life*

In our first reading from the 2<sup>nd</sup> book of Maccabees, we heard the 3 brothers declare successively: “We are prepared to die rather than break the Law of our ancestors. (...) The King of the world will raise us up, since it is for his laws that we die (...). It was heaven that gave me these limbs; for the sake of his laws I disdain them”.

Today what would be the law for which we would be ready to die? As Christians what law would be worth dying for?

Obviously martyrdom is not what I have in mind here and now. It seems to me that we should reflect on these questions from a very concrete, practical daily-life point of view.

According to St Paul, “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rm 13:10). So for us to be law-abiding means – should mean – that we are loving people. And here the kind of love that we are talking about is exemplified and incarnated in Jesus Christ, it is perfectly revealed in his life and death. It is a love which made Jesus die for his friends.

Using the words of the Maccabean brothers, the law that we do not want to break is the law of selfless and generous love.

The challenge of the law of love is that it is a positive law. When a law is formulated in negative terms, things are easier. When we are told: “Do not do this or that...”, it is enough for us not to do it and then we are good. On the contrary a law which says: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind (...). You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Mt 22:37.39) is far more challenging because there is no limit to it... none of us can say, once and for all, that he or she has accomplished it. It is an unending and crucifying business which leads to life only through death.

Here we come to the crux of the matter: we want life without going through death, we are ready to love but in a way which entails no sacrifice.

To love is to consent to die to self-centredness and to the dream of being self-sufficient and completely autonomous. Real love is a way for us to die to sin, to our limitations and weaknesses as human beings.

The good news is that if we die out of love, we beat death because love is stronger than death. Love empowers us, it is the key which leads us from a situation of darkness and crisis to a situation of renewed hope and future.

In our relationships, when there is a deadlock, when there are misunderstanding and problems, when there are bitterness and anger, when people are wounded and stuck in the mud of pains and fears, then the only way forward is for one of the characters to die to pride, to the feelings of self-preservation and competition, to die to the idea that the first step has to be made by the other. The hard truth is that death is needed in order to initiate a resurrection process. A letting go is required in order to be able to welcome what is new.

It is clear that we do not have to wait for the term of our human existence in order to experience the death and resurrection event. In our families and communities daily we are invited to die to sin in order to rise to new life.

A human life which would be lived in this way would be ready for the experience of death. The long practice of dying to all that is not essential and life-giving should prepare us

for dying to life as we know it. A life-time schooling of letting go should help us to travel lightly and to go through death unencumbered.

On the contrary the constant clinging to all things, feelings, hurts, the attachment to a self which has become inflated by years of pride and self-centredness will make us so cluttered that we will not be able to pass through the sieve of death.

Only a just love of the self can lead us to selfless love. In our daily lives and at the last day of our lives, this selfless love can make us victorious in our struggle against the power of death.

This generous, other-centred, merciful and forgiving love is the one we see mocked and ridiculed on the Cross and yet this same love is the one who raised Jesus from the dead.

In 1908, Leo Tolstoy wrote: “The truth is that for our life one law is valid — the law of love, which brings the highest happiness to every individual as well as to all men and women”. The highest happiness for you and me is to be alive, truly alive.

Maybe it is time for us to check, in our personal lives, in the lives of our Christian communities and in our society, what prevents us from being alive and life-giving.

We believe in a God who is God “not of the dead, but of the living”. So, out of love, let us learn to die to all that is not love in order to live here, now and hereafter.