

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
(2 Maccabees 7:1-2. 9-14 / Luke 20:27-38)
10.11.2019
Remembrance Sunday

Dear brothers and sisters,

During the month of November, we remember those who have died. Nature itself helps us in our act of remembrance: The days become shorter, the nights longer; this is an opportunity for us to come back home and there to meditate upon what we are doing, where we are going, to reflect upon the mystery of life and death, and naturally to remember those who have preceded us. The leaves of the trees change colour and fall on the ground; they decompose and become part of the soil. They evoke the cycle of life, made of a succession of births and deaths, with the questions which concern us all: Is our ultimate death here on earth the painful and meaningless end of all things? Or is there something happening after death?

Our Christian faith teaches us that death is not an end, but a passage towards fullness of life. Death has not the last word over life. We believe that those who die with Christ will rise again with Him for eternal life in the presence of God and of all our brothers and sisters in humanity saved by grace. This is our faith, this is our hope. But does it not happen that, at least sometimes, a doubt arises in our mind and heart when we accompany someone who is dying or look at someone reposed in his or her coffin: Is death the end of all things? Is there no life after death?

With such a thought within us, we resemble the Sadducees who did not believe in the Resurrection. In today's gospel passage, to make their point, they refer to a commandment of the Law of Moses: "If a man's married brother dies childless, the man must marry the widow to raise up children for his deceased brother." (Dt 25:5) Then, the Sadducees imagine the case of seven brothers. After the first brother dies childless, the rest of them in turn marry the widow but have no children. According to the Sadducees, if the doctrine of the resurrection is true, in the afterlife the woman will simultaneously be the wife of seven husbands, which for them is absurd. The mistake of the Sadducees is that they think of the resurrection in earthly terms; they think of the resurrection as a continuation of their earthly life.

We have to recognize that this is sometimes a real difficulty for us: we think of the resurrection in terms of a prolongation of our earthly life. And in so doing a doubt arises within us. But the resurrection promised to us is not purely and simply a prolongation of our earthly life, like when Jesus brought back to life the son of the widow of Naim or his friend Lazarus, because we know that the widow's son and Lazarus died again later on. When we will die in Christ and rise from the dead for an eternal life with God, we will not die again. It is we who will rise, but our resurrected life will be completely new. How will it work? We don't know. God knows. We have just to believe in the Lord's promise to us.

Faith in life after death is not something which emerged at the time of Jesus. Already at the time of Moses, there was a faith in life after death. In today's gospel passage, we read: "Moses himself implies that the dead rose again, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob". At the time of Moses, Abraham,

Isaac and Jacob were dead a long time ago. Our God is the God of the living and not of the dead. If he was called the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it is because Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were thought to be alive at the time of Moses. The idea of a life after death was already there at the time of Moses.

Later on, at the times of the Maccabees, our first reading reminded us of a persecution of devout Jews unleashed by a pagan king named Antiochus Epiphanes. He forced Jews to break the Law of Moses by eating pork. The story records that a mother and her seven sons were all willing to suffer martyrdom rather than denying their religion. They were ready to lose their earthly life, because of their hope in the resurrection. One of the seven brothers declared: "It was God who gave me my tongue and my hands; for the sake of His laws I disdain them; from Him, I hope to receive them again". Another brother near his end cried: "Ours is the better choice, to meet death at men's hands, yet relying on God's promise that we shall be raised up by Him; whereas for you there can be no resurrection, no new life". At that time too, faith in the resurrection from the dead already existed.

Our own faith in life after death rests on the resurrection of Jesus who died on the Cross and rose from the dead. For more than two thousand years, we enjoy his loving and saving presence, and we remember that He promised to give a share in his victory over death to those who believe in Him. Those who have died in and with Christ will live with him. We believe that if we die with Christ, with Him we shall live for ever.

When we try to think about it, it can happen that our mind boggles, perhaps even our faith wavers. We ask ourselves: How it will happen? We think that this is something unthinkable, unimaginable, incredible. And yet is this so unthinkable, so unimaginable, so incredible?

Let us imagine that, when we were in the womb of our mother, someone had told us: 'Very soon, you will go, your mother and yourself, through excruciating pains and nearly an experience of death. You will leave the womb of your mum. You will breathe fresh air, see colours and shapes, and smell perfumes. From the relationship of fusion that you enjoy with your mother, you will stand in front of her and in front of all other human beings. You will enter into a different kind of relationship with all of them'. If someone had told us all that, we would have thought: This is unthinkable, unimaginable, incredible. This is pure fiction. And in fact, isn't it precisely what happened when we were born and what we experience still today? The Christian faith in the resurrection is the certitude that death is not a meaningless end, but a new birth, obviously a painful passage but a passage from life to fullness of life.

Lord, we thank you for the gift of faith. We believe in your resurrection, we hope in our own resurrection to come. Lord, increase our faith. Amen.