

32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year "C"  
November 5-6, 2022

*Eternal hope in the resurrection.*

Readings: 2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14; 2 Tim. 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14

I despise "Gotcha" questions, but we see them all the time in the media. Microphones are thrust in the faces of politicians, celebrities or people accused of wrongdoing. Reporters certainly have a difficult job to do, but sometimes it just goes too far. We might well say the same thing about the events recounted in today's Gospel. The Sadducees pose a hypothetical question to Jesus about marriage to test his response.

The answer that Jesus gives is fascinating. Rather than dismiss it as a ridiculous scenario that could never happen, he takes the bait and answers. Nor does his answer specifically address the nature of the resurrection. Instead, he declares that marriage is an earthly reality for the betterment of the family and society. It is a reality blessed by God, but a reality nevertheless for the world. This is its focus and its place. It will be different in the hereafter.

As human beings limited by time and space, we struggle to comprehend. We will still be ourselves in heaven, but in some respects we will be different. Jesus is not denigrating marriage in today's Gospel. In fact, he is situating it within its God given context, as a preparation for eternal happiness with God in heaven. The question on marriage serves as a springboard to make a larger point about ultimate meaning in life.

Several key moments stand out as pivotal in our lives: getting your driver's license, earning a varsity letter, receiving acceptance to your school of choice, landing the first job, paying off the first mortgage to a home. But the birth of a child within the context of marriage often is the event many consider as the most amazing of all. And yet, we are essentially told even though the beauty of marriage and family are paramount, they pale in comparison to eternal life. All three readings today proclaim the active presence of God's Word and the Holy Spirit in the world, overcoming the power of

evil and death. The Jewish martyrs, the prayer of Saint Paul and the testimony of Jesus all challenge us to rethink the priorities in our lives in light of the eternal hope to which we have been called.

The Book of Maccabees recounts the heroic Jewish effort to fight off Syrian enemies who were attempting to abolish the Jewish temple and religion. When their core beliefs were most challenged by new Greek ideas, Jewish leaders courageously rallied to hold fast to their ways. The fourth martyr brother specifically mentioned that he died with the hope that God gave to him of being raised again.

This reveals a developing belief in the afterlife. We see kernels and hints in the Old Testament. Both major schools of Judaism in Jesus' time<sup>1</sup> had notions of eternal punishments for the most wicked souls. There was at least some notion of purification prior to entering heaven, a precursor to our concept of purgatory. The operative vision of faith is that nothing defiled can enter heaven.<sup>2</sup> Our souls must first be cleansed before being admitted to the presence of God.

Coming near the end of the liturgical year, November is the perfect time to reflect on the last things, death, judgment, heaven and hell. As much as we might prefer to avoid these things, we should all pray for the grace to understand death, even our own future death, as a graced moment, part of our journey towards our loving Father.

Even if the Sadducees were trying to make Jesus look foolish for a belief in the resurrection of the body, let us thank the Sadducees for their “Gotcha” question. Through it, we have gained insight into our journey towards the Father, with whom we hope to spend eternity, offering Him endless praise and thanks.

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<sup>1</sup> e.g., the Shammai and Hillel schools of thought.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Rev. 21:27