

Homily of Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

The first and second books of Maccabees recorded the resistance of the Jews against the pagan and tyrant King Antiochus of Syria IV (175-163 B.C.). King Antiochus who ruled Palestine at that time cruelly persecuted the Jews in his effort to abolish Jewish religion and establish Greek culture and religion. "The king sent letters by messenger to Jerusalem and to the cities of Judah, ordering them to follow customs foreign to their land; to prohibit burnt offerings, sacrifices, and libations in the sanctuary, to profane the sabbaths and feast days, to desecrate the sanctuary and the sacred ministers, to build pagan altars and temples and shrines, to sacrifice swine and unclean animals, to leave their sons uncircumcised, and to defile themselves with every kind of impurity and abomination; so that they might forget the law and change all its ordinances. Whoever refused to act according to the command of the king was to be put to death" (1 Maccabees 1:44-50). The first reading is an example of the persecution. Pork was a forbidden food by the Law of Moses. To eat pork meant abandoning the Jewish faith. The Jewish family in the first reading chose to die rather than abandon their faith.

The Church history is full of innumerable persecutions and martyrdoms; which made Tertullian to say, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." There are all kinds of persecution of Christians in many parts of the world. Various types of martyrdoms are happening every day. There are places people are killed because they are Christians. There are places people are denied rights and privileges because they are Christians. There are places anti-Christian policies are enforced to discourage the practice of Christianity. Jesus assures us, "Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11). We are required to pray for God's sustenance and protection on the Christian brothers and sisters who are going through violent persecution in various parts of the world. We pray that their faith may not fail.

All forms of hateful attacks on the Catholic Church have become a common phenomenon nowadays. The steadfastness of the family members in the first reading should encourage every Catholic Christian. Many of us may not be put to death because we are Christians, but we are called to stand by the truth even if taken a truthful stand brings us suffering. It is better to experience temporary inconvenience or temporary suffering for standing by the truth or speaking the truth than forever live with the regret and guilt of lying, or the regret and guilt of keeping silent in the face of evil.

The Church's year ends in the next two weeks. From the Monday of the 31st Week, through readings of Mass and Liturgy of Hours, and by the celebrations of the feast of All Saints and All Souls, the Church draws our attention to the last two Articles of Faith in the Apostles Creed, "I believe in the Resurrection of the Body" (Article 11), and "I believe in life everlasting" (Article 12). "We firmly believe, and hence we hope that, just as Christ is truly risen from the dead and lives forever, so after death the righteous will live forever with the risen Christ and he will raise them up on the last day" (CCC 989). "The Christian who unites his own death to that of Jesus views it as a step towards him and entrance into everlasting life" (CCC 1020). The fourth brother in the first reading proclaims before his martyrdom, "It is my choice to die at the hands of men with the hope God gives of being raised up by him; ..."

The Sadducees exaggerated their question about the seven brothers who died childless having married the same wife. Even if that was the case, God would judge each of the seven brothers according to how he lived with the woman. Therefore, we are not to live our lives like the Sadducees of the time of Jesus who did not believe in resurrection, and men and women of our time who are atheists and those who do not look forward to life everlasting. In our thoughts, actions, and words, let us bear in mind the four last things, death, judgement, heaven and hell.

As we continue our journey of faith to heaven, we pray with St. Paul as in the second reading: "May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting encouragement and good hope through his grace, encourage [our] hearts and strengthen [us] in every good deed and word... May [we] be delivered from perverse and wicked people... The Lord is faithful; he will strengthen [us] and guard [us] from the evil one... May the Lord direct [our] hearts to the love of God and to the endurance of Christ." Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP