

# SUNDAY READINGS

## READ AT HOME

Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C

6 November 2022



### Collect

Almighty and merciful God,  
graciously keep from us all adversity,  
so that, unhindered in mind and body alike,  
we may pursue in freedom of heart  
the things that are yours.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God, for ever and ever.  
**Amen.**

### Readings and Commentaries

The exchange between Jesus and the Sadducees may seem irrelevant these days, but it still raises the question of how we imagine life beyond death. German scripture scholar Gerhard Lohfink has tackled this question in his 2018 book *Is This All There Is? On Resurrection and Eternal Life* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press). Here is how he concludes his chapter on Death as Judgement:

“And so the encounter with God in death will become an encounter with truth: the truth about God, about others, about the world, and above all the truth about ourselves. In that sense we can even hope for judgement, because truth is something in which we can rejoice. I hope for myself that for once clarity will appear in all the dark corners of my life: that, for example, I will learn what I have desired for my life at death. I hope that confusions will be clarified and the tangled web of guilt and innocence will be unsnarled, that the true good will be visible, the ambiguous made clear, the only apparent good uncovered and the evil in me be exposed. I hope that everything that is pulling apart, scattering and dividing my life will be gathered up and brought home.

“Clarity in the face of the all-penetrating truth of God has to be something altogether liberating – and it is precisely in that clarity that the unimaginable mercy of God will be revealed.” (153)

## A reading from the second book of Maccabees 7:1–2, 9–14

There were seven brothers who were arrested with their mother. The king tried to force them to taste pig's flesh, which the Law forbids, by torturing them with whips and scourges. One of them, acting as spokesman for the others, said, 'What are you trying to find out from us? We are prepared to die rather than break the Law of our ancestors.'

With his last breath the second brother exclaimed, 'Inhuman fiend, you may discharge us from this present life, but the King of the world will raise us up, since it is for his laws that we die, to live again for ever.'

After him, they amused themselves with the third, who on being asked for his tongue promptly thrust it out and boldly held out his hands, with these honourable words, 'It was heaven that gave me these limbs; for the sake of his laws I disdain them; from him I hope to receive them again.' The king and his attendants were astounded at the young man's courage and his utter indifference to suffering.

When this one was dead they subjected the fourth to the same savage torture. When he neared his end he 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.'

## Responsorial Psalm Ps 16:1, 5–6, 8, 15

**R.** Lord, when your glory appears,  
my joy will be full.

Lord, hear a cause that is just,  
pay heed to my cry.  
Turn your ear to my prayer:  
no deceit is on my lips. **R.**

I kept my feet firmly in your paths;  
there was no faltering in my steps.  
I am here and I call, you will hear me, O God.  
Turn your ear to me; hear my words. **R.**

Guard me as the apple of your eye.  
Hide me in the shadow of your wings.  
As for me, in my justice I shall see your face  
and be filled, when I awake, with the sight of your glory. **R.**

## First Reading

1 and 2 Maccabees are named after Judas Maccabaeus, one of the sons of the priest Mattathias and a key leader of the Jewish uprising against the Hellenistic regime in the period from about 180 to 134 BC. The titles may give the impression that the two books offer a continuous account of this era, but while there is overlap each covers different events and in contrasting styles. 1 Maccabees has a greater claim to historical reliability. 2 Maccabees employs exaggerations and legends to edify its readers. Neither is considered inspired by Jewish or Protestant authorities.

Today's reading (the only one we ever hear from either book on a Sunday) is an extract from a long account of the horrible torture and execution of an unnamed mother and her seven sons for refusing to disobey the dietary prescriptions of the Torah. While the author's original purpose was to present them as heroes of the Jewish faith, Christian interest lies in the concluding affirmation of the resurrection of the just. Belief in life beyond death had been hinted at elsewhere (eg Is 25:8) but here it becomes explicit. This is not an easy reading for readers to proclaim. They need to keep in mind that, while the story has been deliberately embellished to highlight the heroism of the martyrs, its depiction of what they suffered has proved all too true for defiant religious believers in every age since. They must make sure that they give unambiguous emphasis to the son's profession of faith in the resurrection.

## Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 16/17 is a cry for help from an individual who is being subjected to violent attack from persecutors who (in verses we do not hear) are likened to marauding lions. The psalmist is prepared to make his claim on the basis of a righteous life. "No deceit is on my lips," he claims, "I have kept my feet firmly in your paths." This uprightness of life is complemented by a confidence that God will hear, guard and shelter him. The response is adapted from the final line of the psalm. In its original context, it suggests that the psalmist has taken refuge in the temple, spent the night there, and expects on waking to see glorious signs of God's presence. No doubt, however, the psalm has been chosen for the hint of resurrection in these words, nicely complementing the end of the first reading. When the psalmist speaks of seeing God's face and glory, Christian believers will be mindful of their future destiny when they "shall see [God] face to face" (Rev 22:4) and "see him as he really is" (1 Jn 3:2).

Verses in which the psalmist pleads with God to punish his enemies have not found their way into the responsorial psalm. As it stands, it is an unqualified vote of confidence in God's sure willingness to save a blameless victim. Readers should readily convey the trusting spirit of this prayer, but may need to ensure the unfamiliar response is clearly announced.

**A reading from the second letter of St Paul  
to the Thessalonians**

**2:16 – 3:5**

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father who has given us his love and, through his grace, such inexhaustible comfort and such sure hope, comfort you and strengthen you in everything good that you do or say.

Finally, brothers, pray for us; pray that the Lord's message may spread quickly, and be received with honour as it was among you; and pray that we may be preserved from the interference of bigoted and evil people, for faith is not given to everyone. But the Lord is faithful, and he will give you strength and guard you from the evil one, and we, in the Lord, have every confidence that you are doing and will go on doing all that we tell you. May the Lord turn your hearts towards the love of God and the fortitude of Christ.

**A reading from the holy Gospel  
according to Luke**

**20:27–38**

Some Sadducees – those who say that there is no resurrection – approached Jesus and they put this question to him, [<sup>1</sup>'Master, we have it from Moses in writing, that if a man's married brother dies childless, the man must marry the widow to raise up children for his brother. Well, then, there were seven brothers. The first, having married a wife, died childless. The second and then the third married the widow. And the same with all seven, they died leaving no children. Finally the woman herself died. Now, at the resurrection, to which of them will she be wife since she had been married to all seven?']

Jesus replied, 'The children of this world take wives and husbands, but those who are judged worthy of a place in the other world and in the resurrection from the dead do not marry because they can no longer die, for they are the same as the angels, and being children of the resurrection they are sons of God. And Moses himself implies that the dead rise 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. Now he is God, not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all men are in fact alive.'

[*Short Form: omit text in brackets.*]

**Second Reading**

Sandwiched in between apocalyptic warnings about the end times and earthy admonishments about putting in a good day's work, today's reading is an appealing text. It begins and ends with Paul's heartfelt prayer for the community at Thessalonica. In the middle Paul asks for prayer for himself and professes his confidence in the faithfulness of God and the goodness of the Thessalonians.

The opening prayer has a counterpart in 1 Thessalonians with a small but possibly significant difference. In the first letter Paul appeals in turn to "God our Father" and to "our Lord Jesus Christ" (3:12). In the second, the order is reversed. This could be evidence that the second letter was written at a later time when the divine nature of Christ had come into greater prominence. Whatever the case, this heartfelt and affectionate prayer is a model for believers of every generation.

Passing reference to troublemakers ("bigoted and evil people") and to Satan ("the evil one") does little to disturb the warm and trusting tone of the whole passage. As usual with writing by Paul or another claiming his name, the sentences are lengthy and loaded. Readers will need to deliver this text thoughtfully if they are to convey its encouraging message to the assembly.

**Gospel**

All three synoptic gospels report this theological skirmish between Jesus and the Sadducees, and all place it in the same place and time-frame. The place is Jerusalem, the time is the interlude between Jesus' stirring entry into the city and his execution, apt circumstances for a discussion about resurrection.

The Sadducees who put Jesus to the test may present an absurd example – seven brothers dying in turn after marrying the first brother's widow – but the practice is authentically based on the Mosaic Law (Dt 25:5-10). The legal principle and its outlandish application are both contained in the opening paragraph. The Lectionary allows the minister of the word to omit this, but to do so would deprive Jesus' reply of its rationale. As it is, the Lectionary inexplicably excludes the short conclusion that reports the happy outcome of the debate.

Jesus neither rejects the Law nor engages in theological justification. He simply asserts the reality of the resurrection and spells out its implications. Then he cleverly meets the Sadducees on their own grounds – their reliance on the written Law, not any oral tradition – by citing God's self-revelation to Moses on the holy mountain (Ex 3:6). The God in whom the Sadducees believed is "God, not of the dead, but of the living." It's possible that Jesus (or Luke) is also quoting from the non-canonical fourth book of Maccabees (7:19).

## Concluding Prayer

### Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time II)

May the peace of God,  
which surpasses all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds  
in the knowledge and love of God,  
and of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.  
**Amen.**

And may the blessing of almighty God,  
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
come down on us and remain with us for ever.  
**Amen.**

(Adapted from the Solemn Blessing for Ordinary Time II, Roman Missal p. 715)