

Homily For Tuesday of the 33rd Week of Ordinary Time - Year 1

St Peter's 8:30 AM & 7:00 PM Mass - November 16, 2021

2 Maccabees 6:18-31 "Even if I avoid the punishment of mortals, yet I shall not escape the Almighty."

Psalms 3:1-6 "The Lord sustains me. I am not afraid of the thousands set against me."

Luke 19:1-10 "Salvation has come to this house, for the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

A Holy Death

Introduction

Every once in awhile, I remember something I learned as a child about this faith of ours. It was common in those days (so long ago) that Catholics would pray regularly, if not every day, that one might have a holy death. I tried to find a prayer that I had memorized, back when memorization was still practiced: "O, my crucified Jesus, I beg you to receive my prayer that, at my last moments, when my senses are failing and, having desired a holy death, I may have time to confess my sins and make a perfect contrition, in order that I may receive your mercy and breathe forth my soul into your hands."

2 Maccabees

Today we have the very beautiful story, in the Second Book of Maccabees, of Eleazar, at the end of his life at a time of persecution. Antiochus Epiphanes IV was king of this part of what remained of the Greek empire after the death of Alexander the Great. The king had taken on the title 'Epiphanes'. It is the same word as our feast of Epiphany, which means a manifestation of God. Such was the extreme arrogance, for a ruler to be called a manifestation of God.

He wants to make all peoples in the empire one culture. Many Jews, under pressure, begin to feel that it will be better for them if they go along with this way of the world. Does that sound familiar? It should. Many in Israel were unfaithful under this powerful cultural influence. The goal was to get rid of the signs of religious identity. If you had parts of the Torah, the Word of God, in your home, you would be executed publicly. The big question then, as it is now, is whether

the people will assimilate, will go along with the culture to make it easier on themselves.

They want, not just simply their pagan laws, but they want everyone to bend the knee, to worship that law publicly. They try to force Eleazar to eat pork. There were many things Jews were not permitted to eat, specified in the Torah books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Pork was the thing that most people identified as Jewish. So, they force it down his throat but he spits it out while he walks to the place of execution.

Eleazar's friends ask him to pretend to eat pork so he could prolong his life. But those friends do not understand the power of a public witness to faith. In fact, they turn against him because they do not understand this kind of witness. Eleazar's remarkable speech is a tremendous witness now as then: Should I pretend to go along with the world in order to gain a bit of extra life but, at the same time, lead others astray? No, he says. Instead, I will leave behind a witness for the holy laws of God." He realizes that it is not just living a good life that matters, but also setting an example, especially to the young.

Luke

Zacchaeus is not at the end of his life, but he IS longing for something more than wealth and status. Even before understanding what Jesus is all about, his heart tells him there is an epiphany of God, a manifestation of holiness, that is coming close by. His heart is ready for something more. His heart is ready for an encounter with Jesus. Like Eleazar, he is a witness to us today, to ready our hearts for a new encounter, a new meeting with the risen Jesus. He is determined to see Jesus, even if it means looking foolish in doing so.

Luke has focused mostly on the poor and the outcast. This passage is a sort of exception to that, since it takes a look at the rich and powerful. Because of his readiness for an epiphany, when he has that encounter with Jesus, he is able to let go of dependence on his wealth and status, and turn to God's loving mercy to gain entry into the kingdom. This is a kind of martyrdom. It is a putting to death the goals and desires of earthly life for heavenly treasure. The fact that he shows

knowledge of his own wrongdoing, like Eleazar, he manifests the salvation that is visiting him. If Jesus comes to seek out to save what was lost, then Zacchaeus must be a sinner. This means Zacchaeus was indeed lost.

St. Margaret and St. Gertrude

A thought about the saints we honour today. These are the heroes we hold up as models. They join Eleazar, the holy man of old, in lifting up holiness of life above the false gods of this world. They join Zacchaeus, who lets his longing heart turn away from worldly riches. It is wonderful that we have St. Gertrude, who lived the life of prayer as a nun, and St. Margaret, whose holiness was manifested as was a model of motherhood.

Call to Action

Bishop McGrattan, in his homily at St. Mary's cathedral two days ago, speaking to the images of death and the end times, declared to the people: Do not be afraid of death. It holds no power over those who have faith. Our Lord is waiting for us to receive from him the gift of the joy of eternal life.

Someone I listened to recently, in speaking to this cultural force seeking to give up our faith and assimilate into the dominant pagan culture, explained that the opportunities for holiness of life are all around us. The way he put it was this: Today there are low hanging haloes. I love that image. Like tasty fruit waiting to be plucked, the opportunities for sainthood are just waiting for us to pluck them off low hanging branches

The way of the world says, just fit in with the culture. Just do what everyone else is doing. Just eat the forbidden flesh, the forbidden fruit. It's good. It's easier. That's why the world hates Jesus, who consistently proclaims that there is a the way of salvation and there is the way of the lost. But there is another kind of fruit, one that leads away from fear of death and towards eternal life. Jesus never stops calling out to the lost. That's all of us, without exception. Jesus invites us, not just to a holy life, but also a holy death.

O my Jesus, with Mary and Joseph, I commend to you my soul. Lord Jesus crucified, have mercy on me, a sinner! Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place my trust in you alone.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *O God, defend your cause and forget not the cries of those who seek you.*

Collect: *Almighty ever living God, we pray that we may merit to enter into the inheritance which you have promised.*

2 Maccabees: *Eleazar was being forced to open his mouth to eat swine's flesh. But he went up to the rack of his own, spitting out the flesh. Those who were in charge of that unlawful sacrifice, because of their long acquaintance with him, privately urged him to bring meat of his own and to pretend that he was eating the flesh of the sacrificial meal that had been commanded by the king, so that he might be saved from death. But worthy of his years and the dignity of his old age, and according to the holy God given law, he declared: Such pretence is not worthy of our time of life, for many of the young might suppose that Eleazar in his ninetieth year had gone over to an alien religion and, for the sake of living a brief moment longer, they would be led astray because of me. Even if for the present I would avoid the punishment of mortals, yet whether I live or die I shall not escape the hands of the Almighty. I will leave to the young a noble example of how to die a good death. Those who a little before had acted toward him with goodwill now changed to ill will because the words he had uttered were in their opinion sheer madness. When he was about to die under the blows, he groaned: I am enduring terrible sufferings in my body under this beating, but in my soul I am glad to suffer these things because I fear him. So in this way Eleazar died, leaving in his death and example.*

Psalms: *You, O Lord are a shield around me, my glory, and the one who lifts up my head. I cry aloud to the Lord, and he answers me. The Lord sustains me. I am not afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around.*

Luke: *Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him. Jesus looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today. All who saw it said, He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner. Zacchaeus said to the Lord, Look have of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much. Then Jesus said of him, Today salvation has come to this house, for the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.*