

A reading from the second book of Maccabees.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

It happened that seven brothers and their mother were arrested and were being forced by King Antiochus, under torture with whips and thongs, to partake of unlawful swine's flesh.

Antiochus = An-**TIGH**-ah-kiss

One of the brothers, speaking for all, said, "What do you intend to ask and learn from us?"

For we are ready to die rather than disobey the laws of our ancestors."

After the first brother had died, they brought forward the second for their sport. And when he was at his last breath, he said to the King,

"You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws."

After him, the third was the victim of their sport.

When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, and said nobly,

"I got these from Heaven, and because of God's laws I disdain them, and from God I hope to get them back again."

As a result the king himself and those with him were astonished at the young man's spirit, for he regarded his sufferings as nothing.

After the third brother too had died, they mistreated and tortured the fourth in the same way.

When he was near death, he said to his torturers, "One cannot but choose to die at the hands of humans and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him.

But for you, there will be no resurrection to life!"

Pause for **THREE** seconds  
then look up at the people  
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

A reading from the second letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:  
May our Lord Jesus Christ himself  
and God our Father,  
who loved us  
and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope,  
comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.  
Brothers and sisters, pray for us,  
so that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly  
and be glorified everywhere,  
just as it is among you,  
and that we may be rescued from wicked and evil people;  
for not all have faith.

But the Lord is faithful;  
he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.  
And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you,  
that you are doing and will go on doing  
the things that we command.  
May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God  
and to the steadfastness of Christ.



PAUSE for **THREE** seconds  
then look up at the people  
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## GOSPEL READING – C 32

The Lord be with you.

*And with your spirit.*

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke.

*Glory to you, O Lord.*

Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection,  
came to Jesus and asked him a question,

“Teacher,

Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies,  
leaving a wife but no children,  
the man shall marry the widow  
and raise up children for his brother.

Now there were seven brothers;  
the first married, and died childless;  
then the second

and the third married her,  
and so in the same way all seven died childless.

Finally the woman also died.

In the resurrection, therefore,  
whose wife will the woman be?

—for the seven had married her.”

Jesus said to them,

“The children of this age marry and are given in marriage;  
but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age  
and in the resurrection from the dead  
neither marry nor are given in marriage.

Indeed they cannot die any more,  
because they are like angels and are sons and daughters of God,  
being children of the resurrection.

“And the fact that the dead are raised

Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush,  
where he speaks of the Lord as 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 of them are alive.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

## SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

### Reading I: 2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14

This reading is part of the story of the martyrdom of the seven brothers and their mother during the persecution of the Jews who remained faithful to the law under Antiochus Epiphanes. The resistance was later organized into a successful revolt against the Syrian occupying power under the leadership of the Maccabees.

This passage provides evidence for the later development in Judaism of the hope for the resurrection from the dead: “The King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life. ... One cannot but choose to die at the hands of men and to cherish the hope that God gives of being raised again by him” (cf. Dan 12:2).

This later Jewish hope was not merely for the resuscitation of the earthly body and a prolongation of this present earthly existence, but of translation into an entirely new mode of existence (note particularly the words “renewal of life”).

This existence so transcends this present life that it can only be spoken of by means of inadequate symbols (white robes, shining like stars, being like angels) or, in Paul, as existence in a “spiritual body.”

### Responsorial Psalm 17:1, 5-6, 8, 15

This psalm, like so many in the psalter, is a personal lament. The psalmist is in distress; he cries out for vindication and ends on a note of confidence: “When I awake, I shall be satisfied.”

It is doubtful that this psalmist was thinking of the resurrection when he spoke of “awaking.” He probably meant no more than the confidence that he would come through his present distress.

But when juxtaposed with the first reading, the psalm acquires a greater depth of meaning. The earlier part becomes the prayer of the martyrs for vindication, and the confident ending an expression of resurrection hope.

### Reading II: 2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5

This selection straddles the two major parts of 2 Thessalonians. The first part, coming after the opening thanksgiving, wrestles with the doctrinal problem of the delay in the second coming, and concludes with a thanksgiving and exhortation.

Verses 16-18, the first two verses of the reading, form a concluding benediction to this section. Chapter 3 then begins a second major section, consisting of ethical exhortations (see the following Sunday).

This hortatory section is introduced with the Apostle's appeal for the prayers of the congregation (2 Thes 3:1-2) and an expression of confidence that God will enable the Thesalonians to grow in grace (2 Thes 3:3-5). These verses form the second part of the reading.

Gospel: Luke 20:27-38

This pericope is known as the "Sadducees' question." The long form of the gospel reading spells out the question in full. It is framed in terms of the Jewish law, and was an attempt by the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, to reduce that hope to an absurdity by a fictitious and improbable case arising from the so-called levirate law (Deut 25:5 cf. Gen 38:8). Since that law is no longer relevant in the Christian Church, the option is given of omitting the question.

Jesus' answer makes two points about the resurrection. First (see our comments on the first reading), resurrection is not a prolongation of our present earthly life but an entirely new mode of existence, in which marriage and giving in marriage are unknown. Since in the new life there is no more death, there is no need for provision to perpetuate the human race (this explanation is peculiar to Luke).

The second point in Jesus' answer is that the Pentateuch, far from rendering the resurrection an absurdity, has an understanding of God that is fully consistent with such a hope.

This conclusion is reached by an argument which would be convincing to Jesus' contemporaries but which seems artificial to us. The Bible goes on talking about God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob even after their death—therefore they must still be alive.

The alert reader will note that the first answer deals with the problem of resurrection, a Palestinian-Jewish problem, whereas the second part really answers an entirely different question, namely, one about immortality, a more Hellenistic concept.

One suspects that two different traditions have been combined somewhere along the line. The essential point—that of the second part of Jesus' answer—is that the Christian future hope depends, not upon wishful thinking, but upon the very nature of the God we believe in.

God has revealed himself in biblical experience as essentially the God of the living. In biblical history, in both the Old and New Testaments, he enters into a personal relationship with human beings, and that relationship—God being the kind of God that he is, in fact being God and not anything else—cannot be destroyed, even by death.

"Neither death nor life . . .

will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:39).

Reginald H. Fuller