

**The Thirty Second Week in Ordinary Time**  
**November 6, 2016**

In the 1950s there was a musical and movie titled "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers." If someone were to produce a musical based on today's gospel called "One Bride for Seven Brothers", it probably wouldn't be as successful as that earlier classic. But then again, in today's world, who knows?

The scenario of the seven brothers each in turn taking the same bride seems pretty far-fetched. Even in Jesus' time, it would have seemed contrived. In fact, the only reason the Sadducees made up the story was to trap Jesus. Earlier in this chapter, they had tried to catch him up with the question of giving tribute to Caesar. Jesus eluded the trap leaving them speechless. But not for very long.

The Sadducees did not accept resurrection in an afterlife. They tried to get Jesus to say that there was no resurrection because this woman would have seven husbands and that was against the law of Moses and couldn't be allowed by God in the afterlife.

Of course Jesus wasn't the fool they wanted him to be and he knew exactly what they were up to. In his response, Jesus gave an insight into what resurrected life is about. It is not giving and taking in marriage. It is not about limitation or dying. Resurrected life is about "being fully alive." Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had all gone before. But God is their God even now. God is their God in this life *and* in the life-to-come.

Looking back at the first reading from the Second Book of Maccabees we heard the story of another set of seven brothers and their mother who willingly suffered and died because of their trust in resurrected life in God.

The book of Maccabees offers an emotional history of the revolt of the Jews against the Seleucids, whose leader, Antiochus Epiphanes IV, was fiercely intent upon

forcing Greek culture on the Jewish population 200 years before Jesus. So brutal were his methods that, when anyone refused to obey his orders, they were cruelly tortured and killed for standing by their faith.

To encourage his fellow Jews to remain faithful to God and strong in their resistance against their Greek oppressors, the author of 2 Maccabees told the stories of their martyrs and heroes, assuring them that, like the martyrs who went to their death professing their faith in God, they too would know the same reward of resurrection to life with God forever.

In telling the story of the seven brothers and their mother, the ancient author focused the narrative on the doctrine of the resurrection. At the point of death, each brother made a statement that declared his faith in God and in the resurrection, in which he placed all his hope. Their mother did the same.

And she told her sons, "...the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of man and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws:"

Each of the son's declaration of faith built upon the ones that preceded it. We didn't hear from all seven brothers today, but each of their affirmations together formed a beautiful summary of resurrection, retribution and reward — which becomes an encouragement to all who are made to suffer unjustly for their beliefs.

The key phrase in that passage is "The Creator of the world... who devised the origin of all things..." And Jesus expanded on that when he said, "God...is not God of the dead but of the living, for to him all are alive." So from the moment of creation, all are alive in God and all are called to remain alive in God.

In a couple of weeks we will come to the end of the liturgical year and the conclusion of the Year of Mercy. But today's readings were also selected to call to mind the conclusion of our own years on earth. They remind us of the unlimited mercy God has for us in this life and which comes to completion in life with God forever.

The hope we have for eternal life in Jesus Christ is not a "pie in the sky when you die" kind of thing. It's not a "just rough it out here because there will be a big reward in the end." No, we have God's companionship in Christ all the way through this life, not just at life's completion.

We are assured of this through our baptism into Christ. Because we are human and limited, we may not always have a sense or strong feeling of the presence of God. We may even experience something of a "dark night of the soul." That doesn't mean that God is not with us and in us. Even Jesus at the end of his earthly life called out, "Father, why have you abandoned me?"

When those dark times intrude into our lives, we can find comfort in following the example of the mother and sons in the Second Book of Maccabees trusting in God's mercy with the firm hope for our continuing life forever in God - with the assurance of his unfailing presence every step of the way.