

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)  
(2Maccabees 7:1-2.9-14 / Luke 20:27-38)  
06.11.2022  
*Death & Life*

There are many reasons which can explain our reluctance to talk about death and life. It may be that words seem to us inadequate to express what life is about, it may be also that we feel powerless about death and insecure about life after death. One way for us to avoid any reflection on life and death is, on one hand, to live unexamined lives and, on the other hand, to ignore death and to project it into the future, the most distant future possible.

Maybe it would help us to look at the question from another angle. The passage from this life, through death, to “new life” is not only an event which will happen in the future. According to St Paul. “God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.” (Eph 2:4-5) For the apostle, the passage from death to life is an event of the past, something that has already happened to us. At the same time it is an event which impacts on the present, according to St Paul, we are living here and now “in the new life of the Spirit.” (Rm 7:6)

By our baptism, by our configuration to Christ in faith, we passed from an old to a new life through death. St Paul expresses things this way: “We have been buried with Christ by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” (Rm 6:4)

This new life given to us freely and generously is like a seed planted in our hearts which needs to grow and lead us to reach “the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph 4:13). And so for us, on this side of life, the journey is a long work of actualization of what the Lord has accomplished in us and for us. Our Christian pilgrimage is about making real the sacramental experience of our baptism; every day we are confronted to the same existential challenge: “I have set before you life and death. Choose life.” (Dt 30:19)

Henri Nouwen explains the challenge in the following terms: “Every time you experience the pain of rejection, absence, or death, you are faced with a choice. You can become bitter and decide not to love again, or you can stand straight in your pain and let the soil on which you stand become richer and more able to give life to new seeds.” (n. 165)

For you and me, it is every day that we have to let go of the old self, to experience a certain form of death and to allow the new self to rise and grow within us. This happens when we choose life. Like the sculptor who transforms the rough stone into a piece of art, so the values which move us, the decisions we make shape us into the new creation we are supposed to become, they chisel the features of Christ on our face so that our heavenly Father may recognise the features of his Son on us.

In one of his sermons, St Symeon the New Theologian, a 10<sup>th</sup> century eastern monk, declared: “To save ourselves is not within our power but whether we are to be mortal or immortal depends entirely upon ourselves” (in *Christ our Light*, vol. 1, p. 117). This is an audacious statement. For St Symeon although we are subject to death, because God dwells within us, we have become immortal.

This seed of immortality is love which has been poured into our hearts (cf. Rm 5:5). We pass from death to life by loving, because “love never ends” (1Cor 13:8) and, in Christ, we see that love is stronger than death.

Only love can strengthen us in hope and trust while we are struggling with pain, suffering, misunderstandings, break ups and breakdowns. Only love can open the eyes of our hearts to discern the way forward, relying on God's promise: "Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off." (Prov 23:18)

And so today for you and me the challenge is to be an authentic Easter people, men and women who, by love and in love, practice the art of passing from death to life on a daily basis.

But that is not all, we also have the responsibility to help one another and the whole world to find the way which leads from death to life. And so it is our duty to reflect on our words and deeds, on the way we relate to one another, on how we vote and to ask ourselves: are my intentions and actions really and truly about life, mine and the life of others? Am I selfish and self-centred, obsessed with my own security and well-being in such a way that I forget that I am responsible for my brothers and sisters (cf. Gn 4:9)?

Does the way our governments deal with refugees and migrants conform to God's desire to see us all experiencing fullness of life (cf. Jn 10:10)?

It must be clear to us that we cannot experience life, new life in Christ, on our own, in an individualistic way. We cannot be alive alone. When we cut ourselves off from others, when we are deaf to their cry, when we ignore their pain, and wrap ourselves up in self-sufficiency and self-reliance, then we smother life within us and, as a result, slowly but surely die. Gerard Hughes reminded us that "our survival depends on our choosing life rather than death, love rather than self-preservation." (n. 195)

Our God is Lord of life. He is God "not of the dead, but of the living." Today, here and now, we can make a difference and we are free to choose, whether that difference will be creative or destructive, whether we will contribute to the emergence of life or to its diminishment. Let us choose life by loving as God loves us.