

32nd Sunday in OT Cycle C November 6 2016

Some of you may remember the popular Radio broadcaster, Paul Harvey. He died in 2009. But at the peak of his career, he was heard on some 1,600 radio stations, by an estimated 24 million people each week.

Paul Harvey was best known for a segment that he called, “The Rest of the Story.”

In that segment, he’d feature some well-known person or event, and then supply his listeners with some added and perhaps previously unknown information that completed the story, and made it all the more fascinating. Hence, the title – the Rest of the Story.

I don’t know if Paul Harvey ever did a radio broadcast about today’s first reading from the second book of Maccabees, but what a story it is.

We only heard a few versus from a much longer Biblical account.

This ancient book offers an emotional history of the revolt of the Jews against a terrible ruler who was fiercely intent on imposing Greek ways and customs on everyone and everything under his authority. The Maccabees were the Jewish family that led the rebellion.

It was an awful time to be an observant Jew. Circumcision was forbidden. Copies of the Scriptures were burned. Jews could not follow their dietary laws or celebrate their usual feasts. The worship of Greek gods or goddesses was required.

Some Jews gave into the Greeks, while others fought hard to hold on to their faith. We heard part of the story - seven brothers and their mother who died for their faith. We also got an insight into a most important doctrine of our faith - the resurrection to eternal life with God.

At the point of death, each brother makes a statement that declares his faith in God and in the resurrection. Their mother did the same.

Each declaration of faith builds upon the ones that preceded it,
encouragement to all who are made to suffer unjustly for their beliefs.

Hope in the Resurrection and Courage in all of our earthly struggles!

A century or so later, St Paul had a better experience with the Greeks, as he helped to establish a viable and enthusiastic Christian community in the Greek city of Thessalonica. He asks God to give the Thessalonians all the strength and encouragement they need to be faithful followers of Christ. The word of God had been preached to this community and they knew what was right and wrong. But now the hard part - they had to live it!

The great apostle asks for the prayers of his fellow Christians.

Today, no less than in the first Christian century, the prayers of believers united in the name of Jesus is a force for good in the world.

Hope in the Resurrection and Courage in all of our earthly struggles!

The Gospel for today also focuses on resurrection. Although they held no faith in a resurrection or afterlife, the Sadducees confronted Jesus with a kind of foolish question based on the Jewish legal requirement that a man, whose brother has died, should raise up children by taking his widow as his wife. After having seven husbands, whose wife will she be in heaven?

Of course Jesus saw through their scheme. In his response, Jesus gives an insight into what resurrected life is about and what it is not about.

--It is not about giving and taking in marriage.

--It is not about limitations or dying.

Resurrected life is about “being 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.

These Sundays in November bring us to the conclusion of the Church year and the conclusion of the Year of Mercy. Today’s readings call to our mind the conclusion of our own years on this earth.

They remind us of the unlimited mercy that God has for us in this life, and that comes to completion in life with God forever.

But 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, God accompanies us, in Christ, at every step of our life, not just at its end. We are assured of this through our baptism.

We Hope in the Resurrection and have Courage in all of our struggles!

Listen again to the names Jesus mentions: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. Listen carefully to what he says: “Those who are judged worthy!” Let us not deceive ourselves about Jesus. Let us not deceive ourselves about ourselves. The life that awaits us hereafter is our own life, a measure of what we did here on earth.

Are we courageous in the practice of our faith and in our vision of God or are we sometimes like the Sadducees with a limited vision of God and of ourselves?

The foundation of virtue is courage. The heart of faith is courage. And yet we know that moral and spiritual courage are rare in the land.

Maybe we notice this lack of courage more during the election season.

Our 1st reading challenges us and reminds us of the timeless need for moral courage. Jesus testifies in the Gospel to the truth of the resurrection, our ultimate encouragement in the face of suffering and death.

Holding on to our Christian faith, and exercising our responsibilities as faithful citizens demands the courage to sometimes take unpopular positions on moral and social and political issues so as to uphold our religious values.

--It requires us to advocate in the public square for the sanctity and dignity of human life at all stages and under all circumstances.

--It demands the courage to put the moral values of life, family, care for the poor and needy and the most vulnerable, above loyalty to any one party or candidate.

Resurrection is the promise and the hope of our faith as Christians. But that means we must live with a resurrection attitude, an otherworldly perspective for approaching the decisions and complexities of our lives.

In dying to our own worst impulses, disappointments, and sometimes sense of hopelessness, we can rise to the heights of the life that God intends for us.

Hope in the Resurrection and Courage in all our Struggles.

There you have it the rest of the story!