



20. November 2019

“Incredible bravery”

2 Macc 7, 1.20-31

*It also happened that seven brothers were arrested with their mother. The king tried to force them to taste some pork, which the Law forbids, by torturing them with whips and scourges. But the mother was especially admirable and worthy of honourable remembrance, for she watched the death of seven sons in the course of a single day, and bravely endured it because of her hopes in the Lord. Indeed she encouraged each of them in their ancestral tongue; filled with noble conviction, she reinforced her womanly argument with manly courage, saying to them, 'I do not know how you appeared in my womb; it was not I who endowed you with breath and life, I had not the shaping of your every part. And hence, the Creator of the world, who made everyone and ordained the origin of all things, will in his mercy give you back breath and life, since for the sake of his laws you have no concern for yourselves.' Antiochus thought he was being ridiculed, suspecting insult in the tone of her voice; and as the youngest was still alive he appealed to him not with mere words but with promises on oath to make him both rich and happy if he would abandon the traditions of his ancestors; he would make him his Friend and entrust him with public office. The young man took no notice at all, and so the king then appealed to the mother, urging her to advise the youth to save his life. After a great deal of urging on his part she agreed to try persuasion on her son. Bending over him, she fooled the cruel tyrant with these words, uttered in their ancestral tongue, 'My son, have pity on me; I carried you nine months in my womb and suckled you three years, fed you and reared you to the age you are now, and provided for you. I implore you, my child, look at the earth and sky and everything in them, and consider how God made them out of what did not exist, and that human beings come into being in the same way. Do not fear this executioner, but prove yourself worthy of your brothers and accept death, so that I may receive you back with them in the day of mercy.' She had hardly finished, when the young man said, 'What are you all waiting for? I will not comply with the king's ordinance; I obey the ordinance of the Law given to our ancestors through Moses. As for you, who have contrived every kind of evil against the Hebrews, you will certainly not escape the hands of God.*

Following the shining example of Eleazar in yesterday's reading, who was not ready to deny God in old age, we meet today in the readings a mother with her seven sons who, in incredible bravery, took a cruel death. They, too, were

unwilling to disobey God and for all times give a shining example of their love for God.

One cannot hear enough of the mother's admirable words. Faced with the suffering of her sons, who were killed before her eyes - which is inconceivable for a mother - she clings to faith in God and strengthens her sons to accept death. This mother understood very deeply that the children do not belong to her, but that life comes from the hand of God. The glorious death of her sons for God's sake had a higher value for her than to keep her sons with her, as traitors of the law. She also professes the resurrection of the dead, which for her is a hope to be reunited with her sons.

In Eleazar's suffering we can find a key to how this brave woman and her sons endured these physical sufferings. This key applies to the history of many martyrs we hear about, and here too we find mothers who were proud that their son suffered martyrdom for Christ's sake. Yesterday's reading said:

*"When he (Eleazar) was beaten to death, he said groaningly: The Lord with his holy knowledge knows that I could have escaped death. My body suffers agonizingly from the blows, but my soul endures them with joy, because I fear it."*

The Lord makes the body suffer in such martyrdom, but the soul is strengthened from within. She is in accordance with the will of God, and therefore the Lord will take special care of her. In this situation, we can think of the Lord Himself, who was comforted in Gethsemane by an angel in his suffering (*cf. Lk 22,43*).

The wonderful examples can encourage us when we are called to suffer in order to confess God, so that we do not fail to do it.

Perhaps we can apply a word of the Lord, which has been said in another context, to the situation of impending suffering. The Lord spoke of being accused in the context of persecution, and then taught us to rely entirely on the Holy Spirit, who would give us the right intuition to defend us (*cf. Lk 12,11-12*). So we could transport this to the situation of suffering. If we suffer for the Lord's sake. He will strengthen us in such a way that we can carry it! So we should not follow fears which might frighten us before!

This is an important issue for times of persecution, which may not be far away from us or are already there! Let us trust in the Lord that he will strengthen our souls in particular in such situations.

Because the bravery of this mother is particularly underlined by the text, I would add a passage from the meditation of the 5th of February 2019, because bravery as one of the four basic virtues is particularly needed in this time of increasing darkness.

Bravery does not mean being fearless, so it is not the ideal of the fearless man, which is conveyed to us in transfigured hero stories! Even the anxious man can be brave by grace, for the ability to do so has been given to him by God! However, he must practice it and acquire it in this way! We cannot simply prevent the fear that invades us without doing anything about it, but we can set acts so that it does not paralyze us and prevent us from carrying out what we have to do.

That is what we are supposed to do, and in this way we are practising bravery! We also should not "negotiate" with fear, but with God's grace we overcome it, and if we do it with a pounding heart and sweat-bathed hands!

That is why we should not, in principle, avoid the difficulties and flee from them! The virtue of prudence will teach us when it is appropriate to take up the struggle and when it is better to manage the situation differently! But this should not be determined by fear! The bravery comes to our aid, which becomes a fundamental attitude, to cope with everything that comes to us, to do in the Lord and to do what God is pleasing, even if it means effort and hardship!