

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C

2 Maccabees 7: 1-2, 9-14

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

2 Thessalonians 2: 15 – 3: 5

Luke 20: 27-38

The Garaventa Center

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If you were to ask a Jewish scholar why God chose to speak to Moses out of a *burning bush*, you might be told that the bush represents the people of Israel. The bush was burning with a bright flame, yet it was not consumed. In the same way, God's chosen people are continually suffering, yet they endure. They, and their faith, are never destroyed. This interpretation is especially poignant in light of the tragic Jewish history of exile, pogrom and Holocaust.

Perhaps this understanding of the burning bush could be extended, to refer to the unfathomable suffering which marks the history of humanity as a whole. Innumerable peoples have been born and have risen to prominence, only to be destroyed. Their struggles and triumphs are remembered, if at all, only by historians and archaeologists. Their genius is preserved only in a few pottery shards or battered headless statues.

And these cultures were made up of individuals, each of whom had plans and hopes -- each of whom encountered suffering and death. The horrible experience of the mother in our reading from Maccabees is not unique. Our Lady knew the same pain. Something similar may be happening right now, in Syria, or Iraq.

And yet, in the face of this history, human beings carry on hoping and loving and planning. Humanity endures. The majesty of the human spirit can awe us, when we come upon instances of heroic self-sacrifice. And

its resilience can stun us to silence when we encounter it in the quizzical smile of a sick or impoverished child.

As Christians, we know the ultimate *source* of human hope. We can account for its tenacious persistence in the face of bleak experience. Humanity's hope is rooted in the loving God, who creates and sustains each one of us. Ours is the God to whom St. Paul entrusts his beloved Thessalonians: the God who gives us eternal consolation and hope, who consoles our hearts and strengthens them for every good work and word, the God who guards and delivers us, the God who keeps faith.

It is the God and Father of Jesus Christ, who assures us that the hope of those who fell in the sack of Rome or in Flanders fields yesterday, or in Afghanistan or a blighted Chicago neighborhood today, is not extinguished, but endures into everlasting life.

The bush burns, but is never consumed, until it is finally engulfed by the love of Christ.