



THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

CYCLE C

2 Maccabees 7: 1-2, 9-14
2 Thessalonians 2: 16 – 3: 5
Luke 20: 27-38

GATHERING

(An unlit candle, a green plant and a book on human anatomy are arranged on a cloth-covered table in the gathering place.)

This week's scriptures challenge us to re-evaluate how our most strongly held convictions affect our lives. Last week we were encouraged to look at the risks we are willing to take for what is most important in our lives, our faith. What risks did you take for important things this past week? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The candle is lit. The facilitator opens the book to display a picture of the human spine. Found on Utube, the song, "Your Words Are Spirit and Life" are played. A time of silence follows and then the leader prays as follows.)

Leader: In the center of ourselves you placed the power of choosing, O God.

All: Forgive us for the times we have given that power away. *(Pause)*

Leader: In the center of ourselves you placed the power of choosing, O God.

All: Forgive us when we have sold our birthright for that which does not satisfy our souls. (*Pause*)

Leader: And so, in your wisdom, may our *yes* be truly *yes* and our *no* be truly *no*, that we may touch with dignity and love with integrity and know the freedom of our own choosing all our days.¹

All: Amen.

FOCUS QUESTION

Recall an instance in your life when you acted out of a strongly held conviction.

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are read aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the gospel, the facilitator invites members to mention a word, a phrase or an image from one of the readings that particularly struck them this week. Members then go on to read over the commentary and consider the questions in silence for several minutes before entering into conversation.)

COMMENTARY

What drives people to perform acts of courage which may ultimately even lead to their death? Some call it conviction. Others might call it spine. We know it when we see it. And, when it is not there, we call people “weak” or “spineless.”

Spine conjures up the image of someone who is upright and knows what he or she is about. The image suggests someone who has faced down her/his fears. Such a one is someone we would want to imitate or, at least, with whom we would like to be associated.

Contemporary choreographer Twyla Tharp tells us, “Every work of art needs a spine or underlying theme, a motive for coming into existence.”² Their sense of *spine* allows some people to be willing even to give their lives. When we read the account of the Maccabee brothers, we know that they have *spine*. They have the courage to stand up for their beliefs. These men are not frightened off or weakened by threats of physical torture or death. Yahweh’s law means life to

¹ Jan L. Richardson. **Night Visions**. Cleveland, United Church Press, 1998.

² Twyla Tharp. **The Creative Habit: Learn It And Use It For Life**. New York, Simon and Schuster, 2003.

them. It means more than life in this world. They are convinced their relationship with their God continues beyond the grave. Each one, “at the point of death,” was his most defiant, but true, self. Not one of them caved in under the pressure of the king and his cohort.

It seems that Jesus’ fate was to be in constant controversy with the religious authorities of his day. Some in Jesus’ family-oriented culture thought only in terms of the present life. But Jesus witnesses to a different reality. The children of God will rise from the dead. Our God is not a God of the dead, but of the living.

The spirit of the risen Jesus has permeated the hearts and minds of men and women of God down through the ages. In our own lifetime, we have seen people of truth who have had the courage to live from their faith-based convictions. They, too, have endured in face of harassment, incarceration and sometimes even death: Daniel and Phillip Berrigan, Rosa Parks, Nelson Mandela, Lech Walesa, Cesar Chavez, and Martin Luther King Jr. These are people with spine.

In an age where many people live as if everything is relative, we need to tap into the Jesus spirit within. We need to live life with spine. We need to stand up for our beliefs. For the sake of our family, our neighborhood, our world; for the sake of our God, we need to act with courage for what is true and good.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ How does the word, phrase or image that struck you from this week’s scriptures speak to your life or the life of the community, your family or your world these days?
- ◆ Say something about a time when you did not follow through on a gut reaction to an unjust situation.
- ◆ How do you find encouragement to live what you believe?
- ◆ Who in your family or among your friends has shown great courage in face of dark forces? How did this courage manifest itself?
- ◆ Remember a time it cost you to be faithful to God.

RESPONSE IN ACTION

(The leader poses the question, “What does God ask of you/us in light of our sharing of life and faith this week?” After a few minutes of reflection, the leader invites conversation in response to the question.)

- ◆ Commit yourself to spend at least 15 minutes of quiet time each day this week. Use it as a time of prayer to strengthen and deepen your own convictions.
- ◆ Go to your local bookstore, library, or Amazon.com to obtain the biography of a contemporary Christian who has been an example of courage, such as Maximilian Kolbe, Edith Stein, or another.
- ◆ Write a note of encouragement and thanks to someone who recently had the courage to take a public stand against injustice in your local community, state or the nation.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(A selection of instrumental music is played.)

Leader: Let us call to mind and heart the names of those who have gone before us risking all to receive all.

(Members are invited to mention the names of men and women who have acted with courage for the sake of their faith, people they have known personally or people from history.)

All: God, we thank you for these courageous people who have been models and mentors to us. Give us a portion of their spirit that we, too, may live for you and be united with you, the God of the living. We ask this in the name of Jesus whose courage gives hope to all who believe in him. Amen.