

2016

- It's hard to be a good Christian in this day and age. But is it, really?
- Christians in the early Church had to worry about being hunted down and martyred in the Roman arena...and, yet, many suffered even that rather than be unfaithful to Christ.
- Even today thousands of Christians are martyred annually around the world...but they remain faithful even while under threat of violent death.
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- One of my favorite stories in the Old Testament about faithfulness to God despite mortal danger is the story of Eleazar in 2 Maccabees.
- The Greeks had invaded Israel, and were forcing the Israelites to go against God's law or else face execution.
- Eleazar, described as "a man advanced in age and of noble presence", was being forced to eat pork, unclean and sinful under God's law for the Jews.
- And it says: *"But he, welcoming death with honor rather than life with pollution, went up to the rack of his own accord, spitting out the flesh, as men ought to go who have the courage to refuse things that it is not right to taste, even for the natural love of life."*
- What a courageous and faithful man Eleazar was...faithful even in the face of danger and challenge.
- Even his friends gave in, and told him to save his life by pretending to eat the pork.0.19 "

2016

- Then the narrative continues: *“But...worthy of his years and the dignity of his old age...and his excellent life even from childhood, and...according to the holy God-given law, he [told] them to send him to death, [saying]... ‘even if for the present I should avoid the punishment of men, yet whether I live or die I shall not escape the hands of the Almighty. Therefore, by manfully giving up my life now, I will show myself worthy of my old age and leave to the young a noble example of how to die a good death willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws.’”* (2 Maccabees 6)
- I read that for the first time back in my teens...and I still recall Eleazar’s example when tempted toward some sin.
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- But...in some ways, the mere absence of persecution in our lives makes it in some ways more challenging to be a good Christian.
- Like the relationships between men and women...as long as there are no external threats—no challengers—for the one you love, you can be tempted to take them for granted.
- Oh, but if someone comes along and shows active interest, doing things to lure your loved one away...then you yourself go on the defense, and you do whatever you can to keep them.
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- Likewise, few forbid us to be Catholic or threaten us with mortal danger...and thus we take our faith, and salvation, for granted... and tend to wander towards the sensual idols that Paul spoke of in our second reading—immorality (sexual and otherwise), impurity, passion, evil desire, and that omnipresent greed and desire for more “stuff”.
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2016

- How many people are destroyed by money and their obsession for it? How many families have been destroyed fighting over inheritance...like in our Gospel today...scrapping over even the crumbs that a person leaves behind.
- That is what our first reading is speaking of when he says: “*All is vanity*”...because he recognized that all of our work and toil and concerns for material possessions in this life are pointless. Death comes for us all...and we leave all behind.
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- But we Christians...we have the fullness of revelation that comes from Jesus Christ—a promise of eternal and joy-filled life with God...IF we love God and neighbor, which means keeping God’s moral law, helping those in need, and forgiving offenses. All the rest of Christ’s teaching is simply details on how to do that.
- And because this life is so short, and we lose whatever we have on earth, so what logic does it make to focus on IT rather than on eternal life?...especially if it may take us away from eternal life.
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- If I told our young people: “Don’t plan or educate yourself or work; just live for today! Forget the future! Carpe diem!!”...you parents would (rightly) rise up as a body in protest.
- But...do we not tell ourselves that?...live for today, and think not about the rest of our lives?...except “today” is this life, “the rest of our lives” is eternity.
- We lose the excess we keep. Yet it is almsgiving, support of the Church, charity...our prayers, our testimony to our faith in God as Father, of Jesus as our savior: that is our true “bank”...our true investment of limitless and guaranteed yield.

2016

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- And Jesus tells us adamantly that we cannot serve both God and mammon...you cannot live for this world and its petty pleasures, ignore a life in God and still expect eternal life.
- So...as St. Paul tells us today: Think of what is above, not of what is on earth...for the wealth and other things of the earth that we tend to make our idols to worship are truly vain—truly are vanities of vanities.
- The expensive car, house, furnishings, vacations...most are simply to assuage our pride. How many of the poor could they feed?...and how much would the remembrance of that charity before God redound to our benefit in eternal life.
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- St. Paul assures us: “...*we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body.*” (2Co 5:10).
- Remember Jesus...naked and hanging on a cross for us...having given literally everything for us...even his very life. The ultimate charity. The ultimate love.
- And so...as we receive Our Lord in the Eucharist, may God grant us the grace to live lives worthy of it...to have the courage of Eleazar and spit out the unclean things of this world even under great duress. To have the love of Our Savior for God and neighbor...and to strengthen us to go forth to truly live the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

2016

Reading 1

[Ecc 1:2; 2:21-23](#)

Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth,
vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!

Here is one who has labored with wisdom and knowledge and skill,
and yet to another who has not labored over it,
he must leave property.

This also is vanity and a great misfortune.

**For what profit comes to man from all the toil and anxiety of heart
with which he has labored under the sun?**

All his days sorrow and grief are his occupation;
even at night his mind is not at rest.

This also is vanity.

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 90:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14, 17](#)

R. (1) If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

You turn man back to dust,
saying, “Return, O children of men.”
For a thousand years in your sight
are as yesterday, now that it is past,
or as a watch of the night.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

You make an end of them in their sleep;
the next morning they are like the changing grass,
Which at dawn springs up anew,
but by evening wilts and fades.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Teach us to number our days aright,
that we may gain wisdom of heart.
Return, O LORD! How long?
Have pity on your servants!

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Fill us at daybreak with your kindness,
that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days.
And may the gracious care of the LORD our God be ours;
prosper the work of our hands for us!
Prosper the work of our hands!

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

2016

Reading 2 [Col 3:1-5, 9-11](#)

Brothers and sisters:

If you were raised with Christ, seek what is above,
where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. 0.19 "

For you have died,
and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
When Christ your life appears,
then you too will appear with him in glory.

Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly:
immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire,
and the greed that is idolatry.

Stop lying to one another,
since you have taken off the old self with its practices
and have put on the new self,
which is being renewed, for knowledge,
in the image of its creator.

Here there is not Greek and Jew,
circumcision and uncircumcision,
barbarian, Scythian, slave, free;
but Christ is all and in all.

Gospel [Lk 12:13-21](#)

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus,
“Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me.”

He replied to him,

“Friend, who appointed me as your judge and arbitrator?”

Then he said to the crowd,

**“Take care to guard against all greed,
for though one may be rich,
one’s life does not consist of possessions.”**

Then he told them a parable.

“There was a rich man whose land produced a bountiful harvest.

He asked himself, ‘What shall I do,
for I do not have space to store my harvest?’

And he said, ‘This is what I shall do:

I shall tear down my barns and build larger ones.

There I shall store all my grain and other goods

and I shall say to myself, ‘Now as for you,
you have so many good things stored up for many years,
rest, eat, drink, be merry!’”

But God said to him,

‘You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you;
and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?’

Thus will it be for all who store up treasure for themselves
but are not rich in what matters to God.”