

**Homily for November 7, 2004
32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)**

By Father Charles Bowes

2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14

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

2 Thessalonians 2:16, 3:5

Luke 20:27-38

Jesus reveals that it is safe to surrender our idea of how things should be.

In 1968, in his campaign for the Democratic Presidential nomination, Robert Kennedy spent an unusually hot spring day in New York. For five hours he crisscrossed the streets in some of the poorest neighborhoods in Spanish Harlem. By the end of the day, Kennedy was caked with dirt and soaked in perspiration.

Kennedy's guide that day was Jose Torres, the former world's light heavyweight boxing champ. Ever since Robert Kennedy announced his candidacy for President, Torres had wondered why this rich man's son came to the ghettos on quick trips back east. Why, in fact, was he working so hard and so long, often 16 hours a day, for a goal that seemed so distant.

At the car, Torres finally asked, "Senator, why are you doing this? Why are you running for President?"

Kennedy replied in a voice so low that Torres had to lean in to catch the words.

"Because I found out something I never knew," Kennedy said. "I found out that my world was not the real world."

In today's Gospel, Luke chapter 20, Jesus challenges the Sadducees' and our view of reality. Whose view of the world do we trust – ours, or that revealed by the Lord Jesus?

Remember how the story goes? They came to Jesus snickering. They were sure they were going to catch him with his own words. Why hadn't they thought of this before?

The question was about life and death. The issue was the resurrection. They had decided among themselves that there was no life after death, because they reasoned based upon their experience. "The consequences of life after death are ridiculous, totally absurd. Where would you put all those people? How would you feed them? How would you be able to cater to all those human relations messed up so thoroughly here on earth?" they asked.

They had found the example of that poor lady who, seven times in succession, embraced a dying husband in her bed, only to see him depart before any fruit had set. They did not start with their real issue. They started with that widow and those seven husbands, one after another.

It was only at the end that they said: "Now what is going to happen after her death and resurrection and after the resurrection of those seven? How is she going to manage? How is she going to divide her time?"

They laughed before they had finished, knowing that he would not be able to answer.

And Jesus? Jesus did not answer them. He even overlooked their question. He asked them another one. He asked them about four people who went before them: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. He asked them: "Do you really think those men of God died? Do you really think God made them disappear into clouds of nothingness, into the dark of oblivion? Do you really think that God, who loved them so much, who influenced their lives so intensely, would have forgotten those even you remember? Do you really think God is a God of dead people, of only some life moments? Are you trying to tell me that God will disavow them, overlook them or forget them? You must be joking! Is that what you think? Can you think of yourself as being overlooked after your struggles, your frustrations, your moments of happiness and your moments of real greatness?"

His questioners had no answer for Jesus, did they? We, like the Sadducees, see ourselves as the center of all things. After all, life pushes us to behave and think that way – earn, work, plan – it's life. Time and history revolve around us and our needs and dreams. We have become so intent on controlling our lives that God, the Giver of Life itself, can readily be exiled from our lives, called back only when things go wrong or we need some kind of divine endorsement or affirmation. But the Lord Jesus challenges us to envision a world that is centered in God and in the things of God.

Our response to Jesus' call to discipleship begins right here, with our opening our minds and spirits as we do our hands and mouths in Holy Communion – to become what God intends us to be by inviting God to be with us, near us, in us. "Receive what you are; become what you receive," says Saint Augustine. In calling us to be "sons and daughters of the resurrection," Jesus opens up our narrow vision of God beyond the limits of our imagination, to approach this life with hope in the possibilities for forgiveness, reconciliation and compassion, to invite God to recreate us and our world anew.

Let us pray: "Good and gracious creator, you never cease to draw near to our preoccupied minds and hearts. Be near us as we struggle. Enable us to see you in all the happenings with which you gift us. We ask this through him who surrendered to you completely and whom you raised to new life: Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Jesus reveals that it is safe
to surrender our idea of how
things should be.