

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Renewed through Trauma Thirty-third Week in Ordinary Time Tuesday,
November 17, 2015 8:15 AM **2Mc 6:18-31;** Lk 19:1-10 St. Elizabeth of Hungary
(We are all like Eleazar, or called to be, or can be. But it takes our willingness.)

We continue to read from the Book of Maccabees, and it is a story of trauma and catastrophe. In a way, it is precisely trauma and catastrophe that distinguishes Jewish and Christian Scriptures from all other scriptures because **the Bible story is a story of a people who survive every possible trauma, every possible catastrophe, every possible defeat.** Just look at the great powers that existed in those days: Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Rome, Greece. Where are they today? Even a hundred years ago, what were the great empires on earth? Austria-Hungary, Germany, Great Britain—how powerful are they today? Russia—what was a little puppy hardly able to sit up a hundred years ago. China, India—India was actually a possession, more or less, of England. How things change! **Life is a series of not only changes, but catastrophic changes and traumatic changes.** And **the people of God have survived precisely because, not really because they believe in one God, but rather because they rejected all others.** That's the key; it's rejecting everything else but God.

Eleazar would not go along with the rules of the Seleucid Empire. Why? **Who has a right to tell anyone whom to worship?** It's not about pork. It's not about kosher rules. It's about who has the right to tell anyone whom to worship? And sticking to this principle, **rejecting every human authority, Judaism survived.** And **the whole story was replayed again,** of course, in the time of Christ in a way that actually went beyond the borders of Judaism. Christ is simply Eleazar, and the Romans are the Seleucids. **Just change characters, and you have the same story.** It's those who worship power, those who worship wealth, those who worship pleasure, those who worship fame versus those who refuse to, those who insist that **the real God is Spirit and truth and desires worship in Spirit and truth.** And that's something that cannot be

compelled or forced in any way.

But it requires a great deal of endurance, and in fact it is **through catastrophe and through suffering that one gains what there is to gain in life.** It isn't already here; it's something yet to be. It is gained through suffering and through endurance, because **you cannot go through trauma and keep your very self.** You have to leave it behind. It's shattered. **That's the nature of trauma. It shatters us.** "He who tries to save his life will lose it, but he who surrenders his life will gain it." This is the paradox of life, and it's actually experienced in trauma. And the people of the book have discovered that **God is the force that puts us back together again, that renews us and restores us** and brings us to something new and more vital and more vibrant and more prosperous than we ever could have been before, so that we are all like Job, better off later than before, no matter what suffering we endure. That's the whole idea.

We are all like Eleazar, or called to be, or can be. But it takes our willingness. What we see is a world full of people with tremendous potential put there by God who don't want it, who reject it, who prefer false gods, who prefer the self they know to the self they don't, the self they have constructed and built to the self God has created for them. This is of course **an ongoing tragedy.** And this is the basic storyline of the Book of Maccabees.