

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Ben Frie SJ

The story of the Maccabees is of all times. The Greek king Antiochus wants to subject all of Jewish society, including religion, to his laws and rules, but evokes enormous resistance. It is of all times: the Maccabean revolt is reminiscent of protest movements today, sometimes merciless and harsh. We wave the wrong flags, shout slogans or watch with sad eyes protests that we do not agree with at all. People easily reach for power tools to manipulate the unwanted reality, and so power is always one of the great pitfalls for people. Many find it hard to come to terms with the unruly reality of our days and want to bend reality so that it is no longer threatening. In vain, because we have to accept that our world struggles with everything that happens to us without knowing solutions. And if anything is difficult for people, it is accepting powerlessness. Accepting that we are but humble players in the power play of life.

The authority figures in Jewish history revisit the story of the Maccabees whenever there is a threat to the Jewish heritage. At stake here is religion, the bearer of the identity of the Jewish people. Religion was a binding factor, a foothold in all of society. What God had imparted in a hard-won history was sacred: it gave the Jewish people their right to exist. When the ground of existence is disturbed from the outside, resistance arises. We do not want someone else to force an identity on us that alienates us from ourselves. Anyone who interferes with our right to exist evokes self-defense in us. And then to think that the peoples of this world are becoming more and more divided, polarized, every election is narrowly won, and every new authority has to pull out all the stops to achieve good policy, to make peace possible in their own ranks and to be like Remkes, a Dutch politician who knows how to bargain.

The Sadducees also stand up for group identity. They defend the so-called levirate marriage, the old custom supported by religion that a widow without children is still provided with an offspring by the brothers of the deceased husband. So how will that be later in heaven, all those brothers, will they all be husbands? It may have been a fair question from those concerned about the preservation of religious values. The flaming protest that also here follows untruthfulness comes this time from Jesus himself. What is essential, Jesus asks, what people want or what is important in the kingdom of God?

This weekend we remember our faith announcer Willibrord. In his time, too, politics and religion, faith and power were mixed. But Willibrord's preaching was a success because he convincingly offered values that provided stability for all of society. He provided a religious basis for a sense of safety and security amid much uncertainty. If we look at him, we can draw fruit from it for ourselves, for today just as much. Specifically, it means for us, that in the discussions that are taking place in our day, we must stand up for Christian values. If we can demonstrate Christian values in our lives, in our behavior and in our convictions, then we contribute to what is so longed for: safety, truthfulness, security.

Showing God's active presence in our midst is not about temporal things, about laws or rules, but about timeless love. Dare we trust in what we cannot yet see, the completion of our reality in such great values as service, selfless love and freedom, free from fears, from power-seeking, from existence-insecurity. God wants our happiness, but so it lies not so much in our temporal desires and needs, but rather in breaking free from that

possessedness and being able to live in the proverbial freedom of the children of God.^{id} van de kinderen Gods.