

## Books tell of those who died for faith

By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier columnist

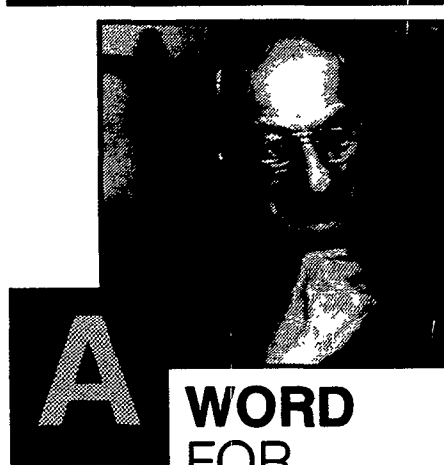
Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 20:27-38; (R1) 2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14; (R2) 2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5.

Two books of Maccabees are found in the Old Testament: first and second — like volume one and volume two. Ordinarily, a second volume takes up where the first volume leaves off. This is not true, however, with First and Second Maccabees.

Both cover the same period of time. Both tell of the persecution of Antiochus — the Syrian ruler of Palestine — who wished to impose Greek culture, language and religion on the Jews.

Antiochus' endeavor met with fierce resistance from Mattathias and his five sons. The first book tells of the persecution and the Maccabean revolt. The second book is a theological reflection on these events to serve as a model for those Jews suffering persecution for their faith.

It narrates stories of those Jews who died for their faith. That's why it is also called the "book of martyrs." Its purpose was to inspire Jews not to compromise their faith



**WORD  
FOR  
SUNDAY**

no matter the cost.

The first reading from Second Maccabees is the story of seven brothers martyred for their faith. It was chosen not only because the Gospel speaks of seven brothers, but primarily because it speaks of an afterlife, a resurrection from the dead.

Doctrine also develops here. Each book of the Bible advances God's revelation to His people. In the Old Testament, the Jews believed at first that there was a life after death, but

that it was a shadowy existence where people were more dead than alive. Thus King Hezekiah (750 B.C.) asked God to give him a longer life, for he said, who can praise you in death? (Is. 38:18)

The resurrection from the dead was first taught in the Book of Daniel (167 B.C.) The second book of Maccabees advances this teaching and speaks of a bodily resurrection.

By Jesus' time, the Jews were divided about life after death. The Sadducees denied an afterlife, accepting only the first five books of the Bible — the Pentateuch — written by Moses. They maintained that Moses did not speak of such a resurrection. The Pharisees defended the bodily resurrection, but they believed it to be a very crude, carnal one. The Sadducees poked fun at their concept by posing the case of a woman with seven husbands.

The case had to do with the levirate law (*levir* in Latin means "a husband's brother"). The law decreed that if a man died without children, his brother must marry the widow and beget children to carry on the deceased's name (Gn. 38:8; Dt. 25:5).

The story tells of seven brothers. The first one married, but died

childless. According to the law, the second brother married the widow, then the third and so on. All seven died without leaving her any children. Finally, the widow herself died.

The situation for the Sadducees showed the absurdity of the very notion of the resurrection. To make their point, they asked Jesus an apparently unanswerable question. "At the resurrection, whose wife shall she be? Remember, seven married her."

First, Jesus pointed out that in the next life all would be like the angels — that is, immortal. There would be no death, no need for marrying, for the purpose of marriage is to perpetuate life.

Then, Jesus met the Sadducees on their own ground. He argued to the resurrection from the Pentateuch. "Did not Moses," Jesus asked, "call the Lord 'the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?'" What Jesus implied was that since God is not the God of the dead but of the living, then Abraham, Isaac and Jacob must still have been alive when God spoke to Moses 400 years after their death.

*Before Life's crosses, Hope and Love are dumb/ Hold to your Faith! God's best is still to come, —/ Look beyond!*

## A biblical approach to choosing delegates

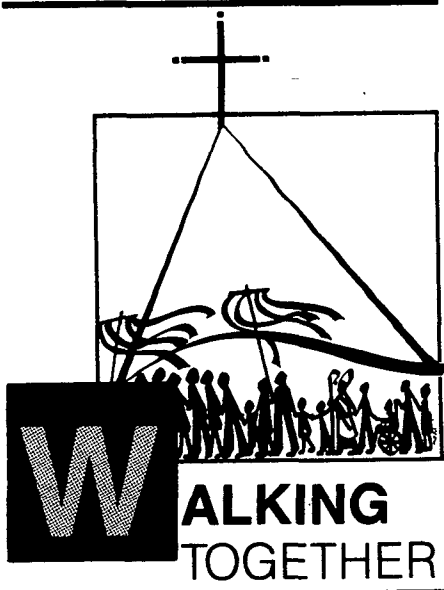
By Father Joseph A. Hart  
Guest contributor

Diocesan parishes and communities are now in the process of choosing 1,200 delegates for the regional and general synods.

These delegates will take their place as voting members with all the pastors, members of the Presbyterial Council, the Pastoral Council, the Stewardship Council, the Synod Commission and Writing Committees, representatives of the religious congregations, deacons and the Pastoral Center. In all, there will be about 1,500 delegates.

Each parish, regardless of size, has at least five delegates — plus the pastor. A parish can send one more delegate for every 250 households over 500 (a parish of 1,000 households can have seven delegates; a parish of 1,500 households, nine delegates, and so on).

According to synod rules, every parish should have a youth delegate (ranging in age from 16-21) and may, if it wishes, appoint one staff member. For the most part, however, delegates should be made up of ordinary parishioners representing a cross-section of the parish.



**WALKING  
TOGETHER**

Parish delegates are not elected but selected. Using one of the church's ancient traditions, the delegates are chosen from a pool of nominated candidates at random.

In the earliest days of Christianity, the church was faced with the dilemma of deciding who would replace Judas as one of "The Twelve" since Judas had hanged himself in despair over having betrayed Jesus into the Romans' hands.

According to the Acts of the Apostles, the church decided to nominate a group of qualified candidates. Those thought qualified were those who "accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us." (Acts 1: 21-22)

They found two candidates who fit the qualifications: Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias. The community then prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen." (v.24) Finally, they simply cast lots to determine Matthias the winner.

There was no campaign, no speeches, no politicking, no vote. The method of choosing was simple and straight forward: a discernment of those who were qualified, a prayer that God will guide those making the choice, and finally an arbitrary selection.

We applied this method to the process of choosing synod delegates. Each parish first created a pool of qualified candidates. At the close of each parish or community discussion session, members of the small group nominated one person

from the group whom he or she felt understood the matter under discussion and articulated the issues well. All these names collected over a three-week period were gathered by the parish synod team into a candidate pool.

Next, after asking God's help in choosing worthy delegates, the parish synod team drew names out of the pool until a sufficient number of names were drawn to fill the available delegate and alternate slots. Since the team was charged with keeping the delegates truly representative of the parish's composition, a number of names may have been drawn before a good balance was achieved.

Some people may be quite disappointed that they were not selected as delegates. They may be people who worked very hard on planning the local synod or people who are usually thought of as outstanding parish leaders. This biblically based process, however, helps us to discover new leaders in our midst, new voices that speak in new ways.

As the synod process has shown in so many other ways, it sometimes helps to rediscover something very old to help us to become new again.

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