

Homily – Tuesday of the Ninth Week in Ordinary Time Archbishop’s Medallion for Highschool Students – June 6, 2023

In the first reading, we heard that Tobit is blinded by a simple accident. On top of that, he suffers the insults of neighbors, relatives, and even his wife, for the sake of his works of mercy. In the middle of an argument over a misunderstanding, she retorted: *“Where are your charitable deeds now? Where are your virtuous acts? See! Your true character is finally showing itself!”* But his faith and character remain unshaken. He was raised from childhood in the love of God. From here we draw the consequence of how important it has been for your parents and teachers to pass on the faith to you. This faith will empower you to hope on the Lord when trials and disappointments arrive. Nothing and no one – apart from God – have the power to give an unwavering meaning to life.

The hope we have been given is sealed with the blood of the Son of God. Nonetheless, it will ultimately be fulfilled only in heaven and the resurrection of the dead. So, on this special day, when we celebrate your accomplishments, it is good for you to look back and acknowledge your gifts. Also, look forward to heaven. Ponder about all the obstacles in life. Take time this summer to talk to God about past and present wounds and hardships. What feelings are connected to them and what they may seem to mean in your life? The Lord does not promise to deliver you from future difficulties. What he does promise – if you are willing to accept it – is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Eventually, none of us can escape death, but the Holy Spirit leads us through thick and thin, all the way to the resurrection.

Much like Tobit’s peers, Pharisees and Herodians are overconfident as they try to put Jesus on the spot. They ask him a

politically loaded question. His answer halts them in their tracks. They claimed to be guardians of the true Jewish religion, which helped them hold positions of power and status, even as they were under Roman rule. They had to trade and pay taxes using Roman money, although they were forbidden to use it in their temple. So, first, they made fools of themselves by handing over Roman money to Jesus. But most importantly, they are reminded of the first commandment, which makes them the People of God: *“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength.”* (Dt 6:4-5).

Awards, accomplishments, degrees, and success are very important, indeed! But not by themselves! We belong to God! Everything you have is God’s gift to you. And the greatest gift of all is the Holy Spirit. He allows us – first – to be grateful for everything, even unpleasant things. He makes everything consistent with God’s plan to give us eternal fulfillment and happiness. This well-deserved recognition of your accomplishments is an opportunity for you to give thanks to God, through the Lord’s sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father, by the work of the Holy Spirit. The more aware you become of your blessings, the more you will allow the Holy Spirit to turn you into a blessing for others. That is your calling, through which you will find the courage to make bold choices and undertake great projects for the common good and the greater glory of God.

Following the advice of Pope Francis, let us pray, through the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, *“for the grace of courage, for the courage to continue on in our Christian lives...”*