

## **Donnybrook / Pro-Cathedral**

17 November 2021

### **Welcome**

In November, our custom is to remember in a special way all who have gone from us. For them, "life is changed, not ended" and so we remember not only in love but also in hope.

### **Topic**

Our first reading today can strengthen our hope.

### **Steps**

On Monday, we heard of the persecution of the Jews under a Syrian ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes, who ruled a vast Empire from 175 to 164 BC. We saw how that persecution was rolled out in yesterday's reading when the Eleazar, a very old man, refused to lengthen his life by just a few years. Such faithfulness raised a big question.

Until then, ancient Israelites did not really believe in life after death. They did believe that God was faithful to those who were faithful to him. But when could God be faithful to those who died for him, unless there was life after death? Precisely in that context, the Jews of the second century expanded their religious imagination to include life after death.

We can see this in today's dramatic first reading. Clearly, the mother believes in life after death and so does each of her seven sons. The way it is worded is moving:

'I do not know how you appeared in my womb; it was not I who endowed you with breath and life, I had not the shaping of your every part. It is the creator of the world, ordaining the process of man's birth and presiding over the origin of all things, who in his mercy will most surely give you back both breath and life, seeing that you now despise your own existence for the sake of his laws.'

The mystery of birth is the foundation of the mystery of life after death. Simply put, the creator who brings us to physical birth can bring us to life again after our physical death.

### **Conclusion**

Edward Schillebeeckx, the great Belgian theologian, put it powerfully yet movingly in a prayer for the dead

We cannot believe that all they have meant for us is lost for ever;  
you are their life, now and always.

Amen!