

Homily based on the readings from November 17, 2025 (1 Maccabees 1.10-15, 41-43, 54-57, 62-63; Luke 18.35-43)

Throughout this week at daily Mass, our first reading will be coming from either the First or the Second Book of Maccabees. Both of these books deal with a period, during the second century before Christ, when the Jewish people were suffering *horrific* persecution under the Greek king Antiochus Epiphanes. His soldiers plundered the sanctuary of the Temple in Jerusalem, seizing the gold and silver vessels for his royal treasury, after which they erected a “horrible abomination upon the altar” – most likely some sort of pagan idol. According to a contemporary Greek historian, they also sacrificed swine in front of the image of Moses, poured pig’s blood on the altar, and doused all the holy books with pig broth. In other words, the king did everything *imaginable* to eradicate the worship of God in the Temple.

One of the most alarming aspects of today’s reading, though, is not the conduct of the pagan king – but the complicity of so many members of

the Jewish population. As we heard in the reading, “they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem” – not a fitness center, in the modern sense, but a structure where athletes would compete as a form of *tribute* to their pagan gods. Many Israelites *readily* abandoned the principles of their religion, forsaking the covenant God had made with their ancestors over a thousand years earlier. Some even went so far as to mutilate their own bodies, “cover[ing] over the mark of their circumcision” to assimilate with their Gentile overlords.

I wish I could say that this type of behavior was limited to one historical period, but unfortunately there are far too many examples to list. It is a sad truth that a certain percentage of God’s people will always be eager to turn their backs on the traditions of their faith – for no other reason than to appear fashionable to the wider world. Modern-day Americans – who have been given the *incomparable* gift of a culture rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ – are just as guilty as the second-century Israelites. The only real difference is that we are not bowing to the

might of a foreign invader, but are defiling *ourselves* because of our own pretensions of wisdom and tolerance.

Fortunately for all of us, God will never allow anyone to destroy *everything* he has built. At the time of King Antiochus, as we will hear throughout the week, God entrusted a faithful remnant of Israel with restoring authentic worship to the Promised Land and to the Temple. As Christians today, it is our responsibility to follow that example – to serve as faithful witnesses to the truth, in opposition to the cultural and religious insanity that is engulfing our society. While this task often seems hopeless, we need to remember that – no matter how *gruesome* the damage may appear to be – God *always* offers us a pathway to renewal and rebirth. It is not *our* job to overcome the kings and emperors of this world – *our* job is simply to have the humility and the courage to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.