

THE DEUTEROCANONICAL BOOKS AT THE HEART OF SACRED HISTORY

It was essential for faith to have a fixed canon. If there were two different canons, that would mean that no one could determine the bases of faith and there would not be inspired books. But then, a question arises: Who has the authority to decide? We find the answer in the Gospels: “The Holy Spirit whom the Father will send... will teach you all things and remind you of all that I have told you” (Jn 14:26; 15:13). The Holy Spirit is given to the Church, not just to the hierarchy, but also to the Christian people as a whole. Thus, those in charge and the “teachers” are nothing unless they are in communion with the Christian people to whom the life-giving Scriptures are passed on. The bishops of the Council of Trent were divided as to the value of the deuterocanonical books although for fifteen centuries, Christians had been using them indiscriminately: that was the decisive argument. Among the group of reformers, one can suspect some omissions on the part of Christians: “Fifteen centuries? These people were ignorant, and here we have teachers and men of God.” They were forgetting the Holy Spirit.

When the Jews set aside the books of the Septuagint, they impoverished their tradition but it was to defend their Hebraic patrimony against Greek culture and to refuse the arguments that Christians were deriving from the LXX version. Later on, when reformed Christians discarded these books, it became a real mess! In the first place, how were we to understand this sacred history in which God ceases to manifest himself after the last books in Hebrew, more than three centuries before Christ, and then, God begins to speak again with Christ? Why should we follow the Jews in their hostility toward Greek since the entire New Testament is written in Greek?

The Church that received the deuterocanonical books has an uninterrupted sacred history. The revelation in Israel did not stop at the time of Ezra and God’s teaching continued its work throughout the centuries when the Jewish people faced the Greek cultural invasion. If the period of the Judges and Samuel experienced a crisis, followed by a renewal of faith in the Hebrew nomads who had become sedentary, the Greek period was not a less important experience. The culture of the Greeks tested the Jewish community yet, after many scandals, the people of God acquired a new awareness of their own path.

The era of the deuterocanonical books was an era of great discoveries: see the introduction to the Book of Daniel. They witnessed the time when the “remnant of Israel” renewed contacts with the prophets, God’s promises and the expectation of the final days. The Hasidean period was just as great as that of Kings or the return from the Exile. If it were not for the deuterocanonical books, we would only have poor Daniel as a relic of this great renewal. Moreover, what are Daniel’s stories except the comic strips of the time? It would have been difficult for us to understand the Jewish roots of the Gospel. Maccabees, Wisdom and Sirach are monuments. There is more wisdom and faith in the stories of Judith, Tobit and Baruch than what some people think.

Therefore, it is time to assume God’s words to Jeremiah: “If you return I will take you back and you will serve me again” (15:19).



The Book of Tobit is one of the later books of the Scriptures. It goes back two centuries before the Common Era. The original text, written in Aramaic, became lost but it had been translated into Greek.

In the last two centuries before Jesus, the dispersed Jews among the nations grew to be much more numerous than those who were living in Palestine. Even when living in foreign countries, far from the Promised Land, was considered a disgrace, they were doing quite well. Just as it would be the case later in the Christian world, many in the Jewish world discovered the benefits of that new vocation as minorities in the pagan world and to be the witnesses of divine revelation in the world. The families who wanted to remain faithful in their observance of the law were relying on their communities where the synagogue weekly worship was celebrated with reading the Scripture together.

However, they were aware that for the most part, the future of Judaism depended on the families' transmission of their identity as people of God. It was necessary to prevent the Jews from intermingling with the people who surrounded them and to keep them from forgetting their vocation. In particular, the father of the family was to bear witness to the faith that he lived each day.

The author of the Book of Tobit wanted to provide the Jews with a model. To write his story, he took his inspiration from a story of "The Grateful Dead." A generous man had discovered an unburied corpse and he had buried it with dignity. Later on, in the course of a journey, a stranger approached him, started to walk with him and he freed him from various dangers. When this generous man wanted to compensate him, the stranger revealed to him that he was the dead man whom he had buried and then he disappeared.

The author of the Book of Tobit used this plot and he introduced the angel... The old story of Tobit has not lost its value at a time when many Christians do not know anything about the path that Jesus proclaimed to us. We have relied too much on "the Church," on the catechism being taught by priests, and very often, parents are not able to transmit the word of God.

The good example of Tobit

1 • ¹This is the story of Tobit son of Tobiel, son of Ananiel, son of Adonel, son of Gabael of the race of Asiel, of the tribe of Naphtali. ²In the days of Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, Tobit was deported from Thisbe, which is to the south of Kedesh of Naphtali in Galilee, above Asher.

2K 17:3;
18:9

Dt 10:12

³I, Tobit, have walked in the ways of truth and justice all the days of my life; I have given many alms to my brethren and to those of my countrymen who were deported with me to Nineveh, a city in the country of the Assyrians.

Dt 12:5

⁴When I was a young man in my country, the land of Israel, all the tribe of my father Naphtali broke away from the family of David in Jerusalem. This was, however, the city chosen among all the tribes of Israel to be the place of sacrifice for all the tribes, and where the temple, the house of God the Most High, had been built and consecrated for all generations forever.

1K
12:26

⁵All the tribes which had separated, including the tribe of Naphtali my father, sacrificed to the calf Baal which Jeroboam, king of Israel, had set up at Dan, in the hills of Galilee. ⁶I, alone, often went to Jerusalem for the feasts, as is ordered for all the people of Israel by an everlasting decree. I went with the first fruits and tithes of my crop, and with the first shearing of the sheep. ⁷I gave these for the altar, to the priests, sons of Aaron; I gave a tithe of the grain, the wine, the olives, the pomegranates, the figs and the other fruits to the Levites who officiated in Jerusalem. I sold the second tithe every six years and went to distribute the money in Jerusalem.

Dt 16:16

Num
18:8;
18:12

Dt 14:28

⁸I gave the third tithe to the orphans and widows and to the pagan converts who had joined the Israelites. I gave them every three years and we ate according to the rules which had been laid down on this matter in the law of Moses, and according to the recommendations made by Deborah, my father's mother, for my father had left me an orphan.

⁹When I reached manhood I married Anna of the race of our forefathers and she bore me a son, Tobias. ¹⁰When I was taken to the city of Nineveh as a prisoner, all my relatives and those of our family ate the pagans' food. ¹¹But I watched over myself so as not to eat it ¹²because I remembered God with all my heart. ¹³The Most High let me be esteemed by Shalmaneser and I became his purchaser. ¹⁴I used to go to Media to make purchases for him until he died; one day I left on deposit with Gabael, brother of Gabria, at Rages in Media, a sack containing ten talents of silver.

¹⁵When Shalmaneser died, his son Sennacherib became king in his place. In his time the highways of Media were in a state of insurrection so that I could no longer go to Media. ¹⁶In the days of Shalmaneser I gave many alms to my kinsmen. ¹⁷I gave my bread to those who were hungry, my garments to those who were naked, and if I saw anyone of my tribe dead, and his body thrown over the ramparts of Nineveh I would bury him. ¹⁸I buried secretly those whom king Sennacherib killed on returning from Judea in the days when he was punished by the king of Heaven because of the blasphemies which he had uttered. In his anger he slew a great number of Jews. The king looked for their bodies but could not find them. ¹⁹One of the inhabitants of Nineveh went and told the king that I had buried them, so I went into hiding.

Mt 25:35

2K
19:35

Then I learned that they were looking for me to put me to death. I was afraid and fled to a distance. ²⁰All my goods were confiscated and nothing was left to me that was not taken for the royal treasury, except Anna my wife and Tobias my son.

²¹But only forty days had passed when Sennacherib was killed by his two sons. They fled to Mount Ararat and his son Esarhaddon became king in Sennacherib's place. Esarhaddon appointed Ahikar, the son of my brother Anael, over all the administration. ²²Ahikar intervened on my behalf and I returned to Nineveh.

2K
19:37

• **1.1** The Book of Tobit is a short story (see introduction to the Book of Esther). It is one of the *Deuterocanonical* books.

Who is Tobit? He is a Jew from the north of Palestine, of the tribe of Naphtali, exiled to Assyria.

Tobit is a man tested by God but not rejected by him. His perseverance in prayer brings God's

blessings upon him. As we say today, "God may delay, but he does not forget."

When Tobit becomes the king's administrator, he is not conceited nor does he look down on others, but remains faithful to his poor, exiled people. He is an example of solidarity for us.

Even though the good he does brings him misfortune, he remains faithful to his God and

My nephew Ahikar was head of the cup bearers, keeper of the seals, administrator and accountant. Esarhaddon made him second only to himself.

2¹When I returned to my house, my wife Anna and my son Tobias were given back to me. At the feast of Pentecost, the sacred feast of the Seven Weeks, they prepared a good meal for me and I sat down to eat. ²I saw the many dishes and said to my son: "Go and bring as many as you can find of our relatives who are in need and who remember the Lord. I will wait here for them." ³When Tobias returned, he said: "Father, one of ours has been strangled and thrown into the public square." ⁴Before I ate anything I hurried out and carried this man into the house and waited till sunset to bury him. ⁵When I returned home I washed myself and ate my food in sorrow. ⁶I remembered the prophecy which Amos uttered against Bethel: "Your feasts will be turned into mourning. All your songs will be turned into lamentations," ⁷and I wept.

Am 8:10

After sunset I went out and, after I had dug a trench, I buried the man. ⁸My neighbors mocked me, saying: "He no longer fears to be put to death for doing that; he had to flee but look he is again burying the dead." ⁹That same night, after I had buried the body, I returned home. I washed myself and went out into the courtyard to sleep against the wall; my face was uncovered because of the heat. ¹⁰I did not see that there were sparrows on the wall of the courtyard and, as my eyes were open, the hot droppings from the sparrows fell into my eyes and formed a white film on my eyes. I went to find doctors to attend to me for medical treatment but the more oint-

Mk 5:26

faces up to difficult situations. In his poverty he is concerned about his people.

He is not overcome by the jibes of others, nor by his wife who reproaches him for the good he does.

His wife Anna copes with the situation by working in Ahikar's household, although they were formerly rich.

Tobit's preoccupation about handing his religion down to his son and his concern for the future of his son, show that he is a real father.

- **3.1** He has dedicated his life in faithfulness to God and now finds himself poor, blind and, even, insulted by his wife Anna. How does he

react? He presents his problem to God without complaining about anyone, not even about his wife.

ments they smeared on my eyes, the more blind I became because of the film. Finally I became totally blind. I suffered from blindness for four years. All my brothers were burdened because of me. Ahikar kept me for two years before he departed for Elymias.

¹¹My wife Anna worked hard at a woman's task, weaving. ¹²On the seventh day of the month of Dystrus she cut the cloth and delivered it to her employers. They paid her wages and gave her, over and above, a young goat for food. ¹³When she returned home the kid began to cry. I said to her, "Where does the little kid come from? Did you steal it? Return it to its owners for we are not allowed to eat anything that is stolen."

Dt 22:1

¹⁴But she said, "It is a gift which has been given to me in addition to my wages." "I don't believe it. I tell you to return it to its owners." I was ashamed of her.

Job 2:9

She replied, "What about your own almsgiving and your good deeds? I have to put up with all this from you."

Prayer of Tobit

3¹Distressed, I wept and prayed; and expressing my sorrow, I said, ²"You are just, O Lord; all your actions and all your ways are merciful and just; your judgments are always true and just. ³Remember me, Lord, and look on me. Do not punish me for my sins nor for the wrongs I have committed through ignorance. Pardon the sins which my fathers have committed in your sight, ⁴for they disobeyed your commandments. You have allowed us to suffer pillage, captivity and death. You have allowed us to be mocked by all the pagan nations among whom we have been dispersed. ⁵Ah well! All your judgments are

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In the Scriptures we repeatedly see that God tests us before granting us a special favor. We will really understand when we hear what Christ says to the disciples of Emmaus: "Did not the Messiah have to suffer all this to enter into his glory?" (Lk 24:26).

He is in solidarity with his sinning people and finds it just to be punished, even though he asks to be freed from this punishment.

He feels incapable of fighting alone in life, and asks for death, but leaves everything in God's hands.

just when you choose to punish me for my sins and those of my fathers, because we have not accomplished your will, nor have we sincerely obeyed your commands. We have not walked before you in truth.

⁶Do with me as you will. Order my life taken from me, and turn me into dust, because I prefer death to life. In this way free me and let me return to dust. It is better for me to die than to live, because these unjust reproaches have caused me great distress. Command that I be now released from trials, and let me enter my eternal dwelling place. Do not turn your face away from me.”

Sara's misfortune

• ⁷That same day, at Ecbatana in Media, Sara, the daughter of Ragouel, was insulted in a similar way by her father's young maidservants. ⁸Sara had had seven husbands, but the demon Asmodeus had killed each one of them before the marriage had been consummated. The maidservants said, “It was you who killed your husbands. You have had seven husbands and you have not enjoyed marital relationship with any of them. ⁹Why do you punish us? Since they are dead, go and join them. May we never see a son or daughter of yours!”

¹⁰That same day Sara was so distressed in mind that she went to the upper room in her father's house. She wished to hang herself. But she thought better of it and said: “If people ever reproached my father and said to him: ‘You had an only daughter whom you cherished and she hanged herself because she was unhappy,’ I would cause my father in his old age to die of grief. It is better for me not to hang myself but to ask the Lord that I may die and not live to hear any more insults.”

His prayer is to ask for strength and the ability to fulfill what God says and demands and not to present to God his own plan and ask him to realize it, as we often do when we pray.

• 7. When we find ourselves in Sara's situation, we immediately blame God.

Sara thinks about her problem and, in thinking, she sees that she must change her mind and must not ask for death. When we look at one isolated event in life, we can despair, but if we look at the whole, we will always find some reason to keep on struggling.

Sara's reason to keep on living is her love for her father and her desire to give him heirs.

¹¹At that moment she stretched forth her hands towards the window and prayed, saying, “You are blessed, O Lord my God, and blessed is your holy and glorious name throughout the ages. May all your works praise you forever. ¹²Lord I have turned my eyes and my face towards you. ¹³Command that I be set free from the earth and that I may hear no more insults. ¹⁴You know, O Lord, that I am pure of all contact with man; ¹⁵that I have not defiled my name, nor my father's name in the country of my captivity. I am my father's only daughter. He has no other son or daughter who can inherit from him, neither has he a close relative who can be given to me as a husband. So, after my seven husbands are dead, I have no one to live for. If it does not seem good to you, O Lord, that I should die, command that people will respect me and have pity on me and that I may hear no more insults.”

¹⁶The Lord in his glory heard the prayer of Tobit and of Sara ¹⁷and he sent Raphael to heal them both—to give back his sight to Tobit and to give Sara, the daughter of Ragouel, to Tobit's son Tobias, as his wife. Also, Raphael would enchain the wicked demon Asmodeus so that Sara would be the wife of Tobias, because she belonged to Tobias by right of inheritance.

At the same time Tobit, who had gone for a short walk, returned to the house; and Sara, the daughter of Ragouel, came down from the upper room.

Tobit, now old, sends Tobias to a distant land

4 • ¹The same day Tobit remembered the money which he had deposited with Gabael at Rages in Media, and he said to himself: ²“I have asked for death, had I

Whenever there is despair it is because we look only at one aspect of life as, for example, the economic aspect. Oftentimes, someone who fights for a cause, or a ruler, wants to give up everything because he is being criticized, without looking at all the good he would not accomplish if he quit.

• 4.1 At the moment when the young Tobit sets out in his journey, his father transmits to him all his wisdom. Honesty, of course, in all sectors of life, knowing that God is just and that he never forgets to reward those who serve him—Tobit speaks from a long experience of life and an awareness of the providence of God.

better not call Tobias and tell him about this money before I die?"

Sir 7:27 ³He called Tobias and said to him: "My son, when I die, see to my burial. Look after your mother. Honor her all the days of your life. Do what pleases her and do not cause her any pain. ⁴Remember, my son, that she suffered much pain on your account when you were in her womb. When she dies, bury her next to me, in the same tomb. ⁵Always remember the Lord our God. Do not consent to sin or go against his commandments. Act justly all the days of your life, and do not walk in the paths of wrongdoing, ⁶for, if you act uprightly, you will be successful in all you do.

Dt 15:10; 2Cor 9:7; Pro 19:17 ⁷Give alms from your possessions to those who act justly and do good. Do not be grudging when you give alms. Do not turn away your face from anyone who is poor so that God may not turn away his face from you. ⁸Give alms in proportion to the amount you have; if you have little, do not be afraid to give alms according to the little you have.

Mt 6:20; 1Tm 6:19 ⁹In this way you are storing up treasure against the day of tribulation, because ¹⁰almsgiving frees us from death and keeps us from wandering in the darkness. ¹¹For, in fact, almsgiving is, for the one who practices it, a precious treasure in the eyes of God.

¹²Keep yourself, my son, from all unlawful sexual relations and, above all, take a wife from the tribe of your fathers. Do not take a foreign woman, one who does not belong to the tribe of our fathers, because we are children of the prophets. Remember, my son, that in former times our fathers, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob took wives from among their relatives so that they might be blessed in their children and that their race might possess the land. ¹³Love your relatives and do not despise the sons and daughters of your people to the point where you would take a foreign woman as your wife. Pride brings about ruin and your complete downfall; in laziness are found extreme humiliation and indigence; laziness is the mother of want, hunger, famine.

There follows an invitation to give "alms," a word which seems old-fashioned but which simply means sharing. However poor the Jewish people may have been, giving the tenth part of their incomes seemed quite normal.

Then comes the command of marrying a girl

¹⁴Do not keep back overnight the wages of any man who has worked for you but give them as soon as possible. If you serve God, you will be rewarded. Lev 19:13

Take care in all your actions and behave correctly in all you do. ¹⁵Do not do to another what you would hate done to yourself. Do not drink wine to the point of drunkenness; do not let drunkenness be a life-long companion. ¹⁶Give your bread to those who are hungry and your clothes to those who are naked; give alms of everything you have over. ¹⁷Scatter your bread on the tombs of the just; do not give it to those who are sinners. ¹⁸Take counsel of those who are wise and do not despise any useful advice. Lk 6:31

¹⁹In all circumstances praise the Lord and ask him to make your ways upright; and to make your plans and projects succeed because not every nation has true wisdom. It is the Lord who gives everything and he humbles those whom he wishes. My son, remember my advice and do not let it be erased from your heart.

²⁰I also wish to mention the ten talents of silver which I placed on deposit with Gabael, son of Gabria, at Rages in Media. ²¹Do not fear, my son, because we have become poor. If you fear God, if you abstain from all sin and if you do what is pleasing in God's sight—in this way you will have great wealth."

5 ¹Tobias spoke to Tobit, "Father, I shall do everything you have asked. ²But how can I get the money from this man. He does not know me and I do not know him. What proof of identity shall I give him to make him trust me and give me the money? Also, I do not know the way to Media."

³Then Tobit answered his son Tobias: "Each of us set his signature to a note which I cut in two, so that each could keep half of it. I put one part with the money. It is twenty years that I deposited that money! So, son, find a trustworthy man to go with you, and on your return I shall give him wages; but bring back that money from Gabael while I am still alive."

of his race and his religion. Of course we find there the Jewish consciousness of being a race which must stand apart from others by faithfulness to its mission. For Christians also, marriage cannot only be the access to shared love but should always serve a mission.

He needs a companion and is given an angel

Heb
13:2

• ⁴Tobias went to look for a man and he found Raphael. Raphael was an angel but Tobias did not know it. ⁵Tobias said to Raphael, "Can you go with me to Rages in Media? Do you know the place?" ⁶The angel said to Tobias, "I will go with you. I know the way and I have even spent a night with your kinsman, Gabael."

⁷Tobias said to Raphael, "Wait for me. I am going to speak to my father. I want you to come with me to Media and I will pay you." ⁸Raphael said to Tobias, "Go, but do not delay." ⁹Tobias went in and said to his father, "I have found the man who will go with me." His father said, "Bring this man to me. I want to know the name of his tribe. I want to know if I can trust him to go with you." Tobias went out and called Raphael. Tobias said to Raphael, "Young man, my father wants to see you." ¹⁰Raphael entered the house and approached Tobit. ¹¹Tobit said to him, "Friend, what is the name of your tribe and of your family? Tell me."

¹²Raphael said to him, "Are you looking for a tribe and a family or for a hired man to go with your son?" Tobit said to him, "Friend, I want to know your tribe and your name." ¹³Raphael said, "I am Azarias, the son of Ananias the Great, one of your kinsmen." ¹⁴Tobit said to him, "Welcome, my brother! Do not be angry with me because I have tried to find out the name of your tribe and your family, for now I find that you are my kinsman, that you come from a noble and good family. Indeed, I knew Ananias and Nathan, sons of Semaiah the Great. We used to travel together to worship in the city of Jerusalem and bring the firstborn of our sheep, and a tithe of our produce. They did not adopt pagan practices when other countrymen went astray. My friend, you come of good stock. ¹⁵But tell me what wage should I give you, a drachma a day, and whatever is necessary for you as well as for my son? ¹⁶I shall give you something over and above if you return in safety." They settled on that.

Raphael said to Tobit, "I will go with him. Do not be afraid. We shall set out in safety and return to you in safety, because

I am sure of the way." ¹⁷Then Tobit called his son Tobias and said to him, "My child, prepare what is necessary for the journey and set out with your friend. May the God of Heaven protect you on your way and may he bring you back to me in safety. May his angel go with you on the way." Then Tobias prepared to leave. He kissed his father and mother and Tobit said to Tobias, "Safe journey!"

¹⁸The two companions were setting off and Tobias' dog followed him when Anna, the mother of Tobias, burst into tears and said to Tobit, "Why have you sent away our child? Is he not our support as he comes and goes?"

¹⁹Anna said, "What use is it to add money to money? Better we save our son's life. ²⁰Is not what God has provided for us enough to live on?"

²¹Tobit said to her, "Don't get upset, my sister. He will return in safety. You will see him again. ²²Indeed a good angel will go with him; he will have a successful journey and he will return in safety."

The fish in the Tigris

6 ¹Anna then stopped crying. ²Raphael and Tobias continued their journey and that evening they reached the river Tigris. They spent the night there.

³As Tobias went to wash his feet, a big fish rose out of the river and tried to swallow Tobias' foot. He shouted in alarm. ⁴But Raphael said to Tobias, "Catch that fish!" Tobias seized the fish and drew it to land. ⁵Raphael then said to Tobias, "Open the fish. Take out its heart, liver and gall and put them away carefully. Throw away the intestines. The gall, the heart and the liver of this fish are useful remedies." ⁶Tobias did as the angel told him. He opened up the fish, kept the gall, the heart and the liver; then they cooked the fish and ate it.

⁷Then the two of them continued their journey until they reached Media. Tobias said to Raphael, "Friend Azarias, what remedy is there in the heart, the liver and the gall of the fish?" ⁸Raphael said to him, "If you burn the heart and the liver in the presence of a man or a woman who is tormented by a devil or an evil spirit, their

• **5.4** The journey of Tobias to Rages will also be a spiritual experience. He meets an angel of God in human form and this friend, Azarias,

will help him with advice. He will lead him to discover the will of God and in so doing Tobias will be able to free Sara from her demon.

torments will cease. ⁹As for the gall, if you smear it on a man whose eyes are covered with a white film, his eyes will be cured.”

¹⁰When they had entered Media and were already approaching Ecbatana, ¹¹Raphael said to Tobias, “Friend, we shall spend the night at the house of Ragouel. He is a relative of yours. He has no son, just an only daughter called Sara. ¹²I will speak to him and ask that he give her to you as your wife. ¹³You are the one who is nearest of kin and free to marry her. You alone are of her tribe and you should inherit her father’s goods. The girl is wise, good, courageous and very beautiful and her father is a good man. So listen, friend, tonight we will marry you to her. When we return from Rages, we shall take her with us and introduce her into your home. She belongs to you rather than to any other man according to the law of Moses, and any trespasser would die. So I know that Ragouel will not give her to any other man.

An obedient son

¹⁴Then Tobias said to Raphael, “Friend Azarias, I have heard that this girl has been given in marriage to seven husbands and they all died in the bridal chamber. I am my father’s only son and I fear that once I have entered the room I shall die, like all those before me, because a demon loves her, and he harms those who approach her. ¹⁵Well, I fear death. I also fear causing my father and mother to die of grief on my account, for they have no other son to bury them.” ¹⁶The angel said to Tobias, “Do you not remember your father’s advice to marry a woman of your own tribe? Well, listen to me, my friend. She will be your wife. Do not worry about the demon as this very night she will become your wife.

¹⁷“When you enter the wedding chamber you will take some glowing embers of incense, and you will put on top of them part of the heart and liver of the fish. ¹⁸As soon

as the fire begins to smoke, the demon will smell it and flee never to return. And when you go to Sara, stand up together and call on the all-merciful God. He will keep you safe because he has compassion. Do not be afraid, because from all eternity Sara has been destined to be your wife. You will save her, and she will go with us. And I am sure that she will bear you children.”

¹⁹When Tobias heard Raphael’s words, ^{Gen 24:67} he loved Sara and his heart became strongly attached to her.

7 ¹When they arrived in Ecbatana Tobias said to Raphael, “Friend Azarias, take me straightaway to our friend Ragouel.” So Raphael led Tobias to Ragouel’s house and they found Ragouel sitting by the door of the courtyard.

²Ragouel said to his wife, Edna, “How this young man resembles Tobit, the son of my uncle!” ³Edna questioned them, ^{Gen 29:4} “Where have you come from, my friends?” They replied, “We are of the sons of Naphthali who live as exiles in Nineveh.” ⁴She asked them, “Do you know my kinsman, Tobit?” They said, “Yes, we know him.” She continued, “Is he in good health?” ⁵They answered, “Yes, he is alive and well.” Then Tobias said, “Tobit is my father.”

⁶Ragouel ran towards him and covered him with kisses, and broke into tears. ⁷Then in tears he blessed Tobias and said to him, “Blessings on you, you are the son of a good and worthy man!” What a misfortune that a man who is so just and generous should become blind!” He embraced his kinsman Tobiah and continued to weep. ⁸His wife Edna and his daughter Sara wept also and they received Tobias and Raphael with great kindness. ⁹They killed a sheep and served them numerous dishes.

How God’s children marry

- After they had bathed and washed, as they were relaxing before the meal, Tobias

• **7.9** This way of celebrating marriage belongs, first of all, to family religion. Such has been the custom in a great number of countries and religions. It is difficult to say what was added to this family liturgy when Christians of the primitive Church wanted their marriage to be recognized. It is the family which traditionally feels it has a duty to perpetuate itself through marriage.

Only in the last centuries was the priority of mutual love affirmed; and before long we found

ourselves in the great crisis of the twentieth century: the family, why? In some ancient countries, the suicidal option was considered normal: a couple without children or with one or two; in other words, the death of a nation in a more or less brief span of time.

See the call to the law of Moses: the official celebration of marriage helps husband and wife to understand that they are really committing their lives: they will not find themselves unless it be in fulfilling a common mission.

said to Raphael, "Friend Azarias, tell Ragouel to give me Sara my kinswoman. Talk about what you were saying during our journey, that the matter may come about and be accomplished." ¹⁰Ragouel overheard the conversation and he said to Tobias, "Eat, drink and be merry tonight. You are the man who has most right to take Sara my daughter because you are my kinsman. Indeed it is impossible for me to give her to any other man but you, because you are my closest relative. But, my son, I must tell you the whole story. ¹¹I gave her to seven husbands from among our kinsmen. They each died on the wedding night. But, for the moment, my son, eat and drink and the Lord will arrange things for you."

Gen
24:35

Tobias said, "I shall eat nothing if you do not stop now and bring this matter to a conclusion." Ragouel said to Tobias, "Take her from now on; I give her to you according to the law of Moses and you have to understand that God himself gives her to you. Receive your kinswoman, from now on you are her brother and she is your sister. She is yours from today and forever. Now God will bless you this night and may he give you both his mercy and peace."

¹²He called his daughter Sara and taking her by the hand, he gave her to Tobias as his wife. He said, "According to Moses' law, take her now and bring her to your father's house." And he blessed them. ¹³Ragouel then called Edna his wife; taking a sheet of parchment, he wrote down a matrimonial contract and they both affixed their seals. ¹⁴Then they all began to eat. ¹⁵Ragouel called his wife and said to her "My sister, prepare the other room and take Sara there." ¹⁶Edna did as Ragouel told her and she took Sara to this room and Sara began to cry. Edna dried her daughter's tears and said, ¹⁷"Have courage, my child, the God of heaven and earth will change your sorrow into joy. Have confidence, my daughter!" Then she left.

8 ¹When they had finished eating and drinking they wished to go to bed, so they escorted Tobias to the bedroom where Sara was. ²Tobias remembered Raphael's words. He took the liver and the heart of the fish which he had in a basket and put them on the hot coals of incense. ³The

smell of the fish made the devil flee to the upper regions of Egypt where Raphael chained him up.

Mt
12:43;
12:22-
30

⁴When Sara's parents had left the room and closed the door, Tobias got up from the bed and said to Sara, "Get up, my sister, and let us ask the Lord to have mercy on us and save us." ⁵She got up and they began to pray, asking that they be given life. Tobias began like this,

"May you be blessed, O Lord God of our fathers, and may your holy and glorious name be blessed forever. May the heavens and all creatures bless you. ⁶You created Adam and you gave him Eve, his wife, as a helper and companion, so that from these two the human race might be born.

Sir
36:24;
Gen
2:18

You said: 'It is not good that man should be alone, let us give him a companion who is like himself.' ⁷Now, Lord, I take my sister to myself in sincerity and love, not merely seeking pleasure. Have mercy on us and grant us a long life together." ⁸Together they said, "Amen," ⁹and returned to bed for the night.

Ragouel got up early and called his servants and told them to dig a grave. ¹⁰For he said to himself, "What if this man should also die and we become an object of scorn and reproach." ¹¹Then Ragouel entered the house and said to his wife, ¹²Edna, "Send one of the maidservants to see if Tobias is alive. If he has died, we will bury him without anyone knowing."

¹³The maidservant opened the door and saw them asleep. ¹⁴She then went to tell them that Tobias was alive. ¹⁵Ragouel blessed the Lord saying, "May you be blessed, O Lord, with all pure and holy blessings. May the saints and all your creatures bless you. May all the angels and the elect bless you forever. ¹⁶May you be blessed for having filled me with joy. What I feared has not happened, but you have treated us with great kindness ¹⁷and have had mercy on these two who are only children. Have mercy on them, Lord, and give them your grace and protection so that they may be blessed with good health and great joy all their lives. May they always live in your grace."

¹⁸Then he sent his servants to fill in the grave before daybreak.

Ragouel organized for Tobias and Sara a wedding feast which was to last fourteen

Gen
18:6

days. ¹⁹He told his wife to bake a batch of bread. He went to the stable, brought out two oxen and four sheep and ordered that they be killed and prepared. ²⁰He then called Tobias and said to him, "You will stay here for fourteen days, eating and drinking in my house, and you will bring joy to my daughter, who has suffered so much." Ragouel swore an oath and told Tobias that he should not set out before the fourteen days of the wedding festivities were over. And he said, "You will go home to your father in safety. ²¹You will take with you half of my possessions; the other half will be yours when I and Edna die. Have confidence, my son, I am now your father and Edna is your mother. From now on we shall be close to you and your wife. Have confidence!"

9 ¹Tobias called Raphael and said to him, ²"Brother Azarias, please take with you a manservant and two camels and go to Rages in Media. ³Call on Gabael, give him the receipt and recover the money. Then invite Gabael to the wedding feast. You saw that Ragouel made me swear an oath, so I may not depart from this house without breaking the oath. ⁴Yet you know that my father is counting the days and if I delay longer than necessary he will be worried.

⁵Raphael set out for Rages in Media and stayed the night in Gabael's house. Raphael presented him with the receipt, and Gabael brought out the sealed bags of money and gave them to him. ⁶The next morning they arose early and set off to the wedding. When they entered Ragouel's house, they found Tobias at the table. Gabael went to him and embraced him. He wept and blessed Tobias saying, "Good and worthy man, son of a good and compassionate, may the Lord of Heaven bless you and your wife. May he also bless the father and mother of your wife. Blessed be God because I have seen Tobias, my cousin, who is so like his father."

10 ¹Each morning Tobit counted how many days it would be before Tobias would return from his journey. When the time was up and his son, Tobias, and his companion, Raphael, had not yet returned, ²he thought, "Maybe he has re-

ceived a refusal, or perhaps Gabael is dead and there is no one to hand over the money." ³He became very sad. ⁴Anna his wife said, "My son is dead or he would not delay so long." She began to lament over him saying, ⁵"why did I let you go, light of my eyes!" ⁶Tobit said to her, "Calm yourself, my sister. Do not worry. He is well." ⁷She replied, "Keep quiet, do not try to deceive me, my child is dead." Every day she went out along the road which her son had taken. By day, she took no food; by night, she never ceased crying, unable to sleep.

When the fourteen days of festivities were over during which Ragouel had sworn that Tobias should stay with him, Tobias went to Ragouel and said, "Let me return home because my parents will certainly be despairing that they will never see me again." ⁸Ragouel replied, "Stay with me and I will send messengers to your father to give him news of you." ⁹Tobias said, "No, let me go to them." ¹⁰Then Ragouel handed over to him his wife Sara and half of all his goods: servants, oxen, sheep, donkeys, camels, clothes, silver and various other things. Ragouel blessed them and allowed them to set out. ¹¹Bidding farewell to Tobias he said to him, "Goodbye, my son, safe journey! May the Lord of Heaven bless you and make you fruitful and may I see your children before I die."

¹²To his daughter, Sara, he said, "Honor your parents-in-law, since from now on they are your parents just as we are who gave you life. Go in peace, my daughter, and may we always hear good things of you." He embraced her and let them depart. Edna, in her turn, said to Tobias, "My dear son, may the Lord bring you back one day so that I may see your children and be happy before the Lord. I entrust my daughter to your care. Do not cause her any sadness."

¹³After that, Tobias left Ragouel's house. He praised God who had brought his journey to such a happy conclusion, and he blessed Ragouel and his wife, Edna.

Tobias returns to his father's house

11 ¹When they arrived near Kaserin which faces the city of Nineveh, ²Raphael said to Tobias, "You know in what state your father Tobit was when we left him; ³let us go ahead to prepare the

Gen
45:26

house before your wife Sara arrives. ⁴Bring with you the gall of the fish.” The dog also went with them, walking behind them.

⁵Now Anna was sitting there, scanning the road along which her son should return. ⁶She saw Tobias and Raphael coming in the distance and said to the father of Tobias, “Your son is coming with the man who accompanied him.”

⁷While Tobias and Raphael were still going along the road, Raphael said to Tobias, “I am sure that your father will regain his sight. ⁸Rub his eyes with the fish gall and when he feels his eyes itching, he will rub them and the film will come away like scales from his eyes. He will regain his sight and see the light.”

⁹Anna ran to meet Tobias and threw her arms around his neck saying, “At last I have seen you again, my child. Now I can die!” And both of them began to cry. ¹⁰Tobit also got up and, stumbling, arrived at the door of the courtyard. Tobias ran to him ¹¹with the fish gall in his hand. He breathed on his father’s eyes, embraced him and said, “Father, have confidence!” ¹²Then he spread the fish gall on Tobit’s eyes. Tobias waited. ¹³When his eyes began to itch, Tobit rubbed them and with both hands scaled off the film from the corners of his eyes. When Tobit saw his son he threw his arms around Tobias’ neck ¹⁴and began to weep. He said, “Blessed be you, O God. Blessed be your name forever. Blessed be your holy angels. ¹⁵You have punished me, but you have taken pity on me, and now I can see my son, Tobias.”

Tobias was very happy. After entering the house he told his father about the important things that had happened in Media. He told his father about the successful outcome of his journey, how he got the money, and how he married Sara, daughter of Ragouel, who just then was approaching the gates of Nineveh.

¹⁶Tobit, happy and praising God, went out to meet his daughter-in-law at the gates of Nineveh. All those who saw him, walking alone and unaided, were amazed that he

could see. ¹⁷Tobit proclaimed to them that God had taken pity on him and cured him. Then he went to Sara and blessed her saying, “Welcome, daughter! May God be blessed for having brought you to us and may your father and mother also be blessed.”

It was a day of great rejoicing for all Tobit’s relatives who lived in Nineveh. ¹⁸Ahikar, Tobit’s nephew and Nabad arrived (from Elymiade) and the wedding celebrations lasted for a week.

It is fitting to discover and praise the works of God

12 • ¹When the wedding feast was over, Tobit called Tobias, his son, and said to him, “Be sure you give the wages to the man who accompanied you, and we should add something extra.” ²Tobias said, “What shall I give him? It would not be too much if I were to give him half of what I have brought back since ³he has brought me home again safe and sound. He has taken care of my wife and he helped me to get back the money. He has also cured your blindness.” ⁴The old man said, “That amount would be well justified in his case.”

⁵Then Tobias called the angel and said to him, “Please take half of all that you have brought.” ⁶The angel took Tobit and Tobias to one side and said to them,

“Bless God, return thanks to him, proclaim his glory and render him thanks before all the living for all he has done for you. It is good to praise God and to exalt his name, by making known in a worthy manner the story of God’s deeds. Do not be slow in giving him thanks. ⁷It is good to hide the secrets of kings but to make known publicly the works of God. Do the works of God. Do good, and evil will not harm you. ⁸It is a good thing to accompany prayer with fasting, almsgiving and justice. It is better to do a little with honor than much with injustice. It is better to give alms than to treasure up gold. ⁹Almsgiving preserves from death; it purifies from all sin. Those people who give alms and act justly will have a long life, ¹⁰but sinners only harm themselves.

• **12.1 Almsgiving—sharing—preserves from death; it purifies from all sin** (v. 9). The words used by Tobit are those of a society which in no way resembles our own. Sharing today takes many forms when nations begin to realize we are all one humanity. Sharing remains a basic law: if today many individuals and families

find themselves in difficulties for which they cannot always blame “society”, we must also ask ourselves if we have sufficiently shared with others, thereby drawing God’s blessing. The Wisdom Books will repeat it: the unjust borrow and never repay, the just give generously and have what they need.

Gen
46:30

Lk 15:20

Sir 3:30;
Dn 4:24

¹¹I will hide nothing from you. Yes, I have said that it is good to keep the secrets of kings but to make known publicly the glorious works of God. ¹²Tobit, when you and your daughter-in-law Sara prayed, I kept the remembrance of your prayer before the Holy One; when you, Tobit, buried the dead, ¹³I was with you in the same way; and when you did not hesitate to rise up and leave your meal in order to hide the dead man, your good deed did not go unnoticed because I was with you.

¹⁴Well, God sent me to cure you and also to cure Sara, your daughter-in-law. ¹⁵I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels who present the prayers of holy people and who stand before the glory of God.”

Lk 1:19;
Rev 8:2;
Mt 18:10

¹⁶They both trembled with fear. They threw themselves face downwards on the ground because they were seized with terror. ¹⁷But Raphael said to them, “Do not be afraid; be at peace! Bless God always, ¹⁸for I did not come on my own account but because God willed it. Bless him forever. ¹⁹All the time that I was visible to you I neither ate nor drank anything. I only appeared to do so. ²⁰Now bless and give thanks to God, because I am returning to the One who sent me. Write down in a book all that has happened.”

Jdg
13:20;
Jn 20:17;
Acts 1:9

²¹Then he rose up and disappeared. Tobit and Tobias got up, but Raphael was no longer visible. ²²They made known the great and wonderful works of God and how an angel of the Lord had appeared to them.

The song of Tobit

13 ¹Tobit, in an ecstasy of joy, composed a prayer: “Blessed be God, living and reigning for all ages.

²It is he who punishes and he who has mercy;

who makes people go down to the depths off the underworld and rise up again from the great abyss. No one can escape his hand.

³Give him thanks, people of Israel, before all the nations.

Though he has dispersed you among them ⁴he now shows you his greatness. Exalt him before all the living, because he is our God and Lord, our Father forever.

⁵He punishes us for our wrongdoing but again he will forgive us. He will bring us together again

from amongst all the nations among whom we have been dispersed.

⁶If you turn back to him with all your heart and soul,

Dt 30:2

and live justly before him, then he will turn back to you and will no longer hide his face from you.

⁷See what he has done for you and return him thanks aloud. Bless the Lord who alone is just and praise the King of ages.

⁸I, in the land of my captivity, will return him thanks and show his strength and greatness to my sinful people.

Be converted, you sinners, and live justly before him, certain that he will be pleased with you and show you mercy.

⁹I will praise my God the King of heaven; my soul, radiant with happiness, will proclaim his greatness.

¹⁰May all in Jerusalem give thanks to him.

¹¹Jerusalem, Holy City, God will punish you because of the sins of your children, but he will have pity once more on the children of the just.

17m
1:17

Jerusalem, return thanks to the Lord in a worthy manner

and bless the King of the ages, in order that his temple may be rebuilt in your midst with joy;

¹²that, there, God will gladden your exiles and show love to the unfortunate.

¹³Many nations will come from afar to celebrate the name of the Lord God.

They will carry gifts in their hands, gifts for the King of heaven.

Generation after generation will manifest their joy,

and your name will be glorified forever.

¹⁴Jerusalem, cursed be all who hate you.

Blessed forever be those who love you.

¹⁵You will rejoice and be glad

because the children of the just will be gathered again to praise the Lord of all ages.

¹⁶Blessed those who love you, Jerusalem, and rejoice in your peace.

Blessed also those who have sorrowed because of your calamities;

they will rejoice again on seeing your glory and they will share your happiness forever.

May my soul bless God, the great King, ¹⁷because Jerusalem will be rebuilt.

Is 54:11;
Rev
21:18

Her gates will be built of sapphires and emeralds,

her walls of precious stones, her towers and ramparts of pure gold,

her squares will be paved with mosaics of beryl, ruby, and stone of Ophir.

¹⁸All her streets will cry out with joy and her inhabitants will shout, "Alleluia."

They will praise God saying, "Blessed be God who has glorified you forever."

Last words of Tobit

14 ¹In this way Tobit ended his song of thanksgiving. Tobit died peacefully at the age of one hundred and twelve years, and was buried with honor in Nineveh. ²He was sixty-two years old when he became blind. Eight years later he regained his sight. He lived happily, practiced almsgiving, and continued to praise God and to proclaim his great works. ³When he was very old he called Tobias and said to him, "My son, you see that I have become old and that I am near death. Take your children ⁴and go to Media because I believe in the word of God which Nahum prophesied about Nineveh. Everything that the prophets sent by God pronounced about Assyria and Nineveh will happen. No word will be forgotten but it will all come to pass in due time. Nineveh will be destroyed. You will be safer in Media, where there will be peace for some time, because I am certain and I believe that all that God has said will be fulfilled.

Our brothers and sisters who live in the land of Israel will be dispersed and led away into captivity. As a result the whole of the land of Israel will be deserted. Jerusalem and Samaria will be desolate. The house of God will be burned down and left in ruins for some time. ⁵But God will again take pity on his people and they will return to their land. They will rebuild the temple, though it will not be like the first one, until better times come. When that time comes they will all return from captivity. They will rebuild Jerusalem in all its magnificence. In it they will rebuild the house of God in all its glory for all generations to come, just as the prophets have foretold.

⁶People of all nations will be converted and know the true God. They will bury their idols which led them into error ⁷and they will praise the God of Justice. All the

Israelites saved at that time will remember the Lord in all truth. They will come together and go to Jerusalem. They will live securely forever in the land of Abraham which will be given back to them. Those who sincerely love God will rejoice. But sinners and the unjust will disappear from the earth.

⁸My son, leave Nineveh. Do not remain here.

⁹Now, my children, I give you this advice: serve God and do what is pleasing in his sight. Teach your children how to exercise justice and how to give alms. Teach them also to remember God and to exalt his name sincerely at all times, with all their strength.

¹⁰The very day that you bury your mother here beside me, do not stay overnight in this place. I know that the people here commit many injustices and practice great treachery and no one is ashamed of doing so. You see what Nadab did to Ahikar my nephew who had brought him up. He buried him alive. But God punished Nadab by exposing his injustice. He brought Ahikar into the light and sent Nadab down into eternal darkness, because he had tried to kill him. Because he gave alms, Ahikar was delivered from the death planned for him by Nadab. Instead, Nadab fell into the trap and perished. ¹¹So, my children, see what almsgiving does, and also how wrongdoing leads to death. But I feel I am breathing my last." They laid him on his bed and he died. He was given an honorable burial.

¹²When Anna his mother died, Tobias buried her next to his father. Then Tobias with his wife and family made their way to Media and settled in Ecbatana near Ragouel, his father-in-law. ¹³He took great care of his parents-in-law in their old age and he buried them with honor in Ecbatana in Media. Tobias inherited Ragouel's fortune as well as that of his father Tobit.

¹⁴Tobias died at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven years at Ecbatana in Media. ¹⁵But before he died he saw the downfall of Nineveh which Nebuchadnezzar destroyed. He saw the Ninevites and the Assyrians reduced to slavery and taken to Media. Thus, before he died, he was able to rejoice over the fate of Nineveh. He praised the Lord God forever.

Ezk 40

Ezk
33:24;
Ps
104:35

Nh 3:19