

It also happened that seven brothers with their mother were arrested and tortured with whips and scourges by the king to force them to eat pork in violation of God's law. Most admirable and worthy of everlasting remembrance was the mother who, seeing her seven sons perish in a single day, bore it courageously because of her hope in the Lord. Filled with a noble spirit that stirred her womanly reason with manly emotion, she exhorted each of them in the language of their ancestors with these words:

"I do not know how you came to be in my womb; it was not I who gave you breath and life, nor was it I who arranged the elements you are made of. Therefore, since it is the Creator of the universe who shaped the beginning of humankind and brought about the origin of everything, he, in his mercy, will give you back both breath and life, because you now disregard yourselves for the sake of his law."

Antiochus, suspecting insult in her words, thought he was being ridiculed. As the youngest brother was still alive, the king appealed to him, not with mere words, but with promises on oath, to make him rich and happy if he would abandon his ancestral customs: he would make him his Friend and entrust him with high office. When the youth paid no attention to him at all, the king appealed to the mother, urging her to advise her boy to save his life. After he had urged her for a long time, she agreed to persuade her son.

She leaned over close to him and, in derision of the cruel tyrant, said in their native language: "Son, have pity on me, who carried you in my womb for nine months, nursed you for three years, brought you up, educated and supported you to your present age. I beg you, child, to look at the heavens and the earth and see all that is in them; then you will know that God did not make them out of existing things. In the same way mankind came into existence. Do not be afraid of this executioner, but be worthy of your brothers and accept death, so that in the time of mercy I may receive you again with your brothers." Thus he too died undefiled, putting all his trust in the Lord.

Last of all, after her sons, the mother was put to death.



► **REFLECTION:** This scene seems more like two stories than one. One story is the interwoven love of the LORD, of a mother, and of her sons. The other story is about a king who does his best to cause horror but succeeds only in proving his own irrelevance. Nothing the king offers (money, power, "mercy") has any appeal to this family. The crisis fails to distract the mother from her exploration of the mysteries of

Creation, eternal life and motherhood. Under threat, she asks *her sons* for pity, not the king. What is your experience? Has the world ever offered something *worthless* to lure a family member or a friend apart and away? Do you have a special memory of a time when you or someone close to you came through a crisis *well* because of a supportive, loving network?