

Life can be difficult at times ... sometimes so difficult we might even pray to God for the mercy of a swift death. The Book of Tobit contains two central characters who pray for death.

- Tobit lives in captivity having been deported to Nineveh. After many losses, the final blow to him was the loss of his sight. Because of all of these hardships and misfortunes, he prays that the Lord will let him die. "But recalling the large sum he had formerly deposited in far-off Media, he sends his son Tobiah there to bring back the money" (Tobit intro).
- "In Media, at this same time, a young woman, Sarah, also prays for death, because she has lost seven husbands, each killed in turn on his wedding night by the demon Asmodeus" (Tobit intro).

God always hears our prayers. We must be patient and humble to accept the answer that God gives us. God hears the angst in the prayers of Tobit and Sarah and instead of sending them death, sends the Archangel Raphael disguised as a human to help them through their struggles. Raphael's name means "God heals."

Tobit hires Raphael to escort his son Tobias as he journeys to Media. Wouldn't life be so easy if we could rent an angel whenever life got tough. However, Tobit is unaware of Raphael's heavenly origin for he comes disguised as a man named Azarias. Jesus teaches us to feed the hungry and clothe the naked for in doing so we feed and clothe Christ in disguise. Like Tobit with scales over his eyes, we often fail to see the heavenly reality before us. So, with a charitable heart, we must always be on the lookout to help others in need. We never know when we will meet Jesus in disguise or one of his messengers that he has sent to help us. God sees the good that we do in secret and is very pleased when we love our neighbor as ourselves.

As Tobiah journeys to Media to reclaim his father's hidden fortune, trouble imperils the mission. Tobiah is attacked by a large fish in the Tigris River. The angel instructs Tobiah: "Grab the fish and hold on to it! ... Its gall, heart, and liver are useful for medicine" (Tob 6:4-5).

- Following the disguised angels prompting, "Tobiah marries Sarah, and uses the fish's heart and liver to drive Asmodeus from the bridal chamber" (Intro).
- Returning to Nineveh with his wife and his father's money, "Tobiah rubs the fish's gall into his father's eyes and cures him" (Intro).

In prayer, God quietly speaks to each of us and offers us help to deal with the problems that would otherwise overwhelm us. Just as Tobiah followed the promptings of the hidden angel Raphael, we too are called to carefully discern the voice of God and to follow it. In the midst of a noisy world with distractions and many loud voices trying to lead us in the wrong direction, we must find the quiet time for prayer in order to listen intently for the voice of truth leading us to do good.

Both Tobit and Sarah had their prayers answered but in a way they could have never dreamed of. God has restored the joy of life to each of them and they are most gracious and thankful. As we struggle with our own crosses, we must thank God for the little blessings that help us to take one day at a time.

The Book of Tobit offers many other lessons as well:

- We must be faithful to God and his commandments. Honor your father and mother for as long as they live and do not abandon them. Do whatever pleases them, and do not grieve them in any way (4:3).
- "Perform righteous deeds all the days of your life, and do not tread the paths of wickedness" (4:5).
- "If you have great wealth, give alms out of your abundance; if you have but little, do not be afraid to give alms even of that little" (4:8).
- Do not fear to live in poverty. "You will have great wealth, if you fear God, avoid all sin, and do what is good before the Lord your God" (4:21).