RESURRECTION OR IMMORTALITY?

There was once a humanitarian sage, healer, and political dissident. He wandered about, largely ignored except for a rare passing mention by a local historian. Nevertheless, this man was not about to let anyone or anything get in the way of his relationship with his Father. He was “all in.”

And then it happened, the impossible, the unconscionable. And nothing would ever be the same again after this man - Jesus - rose from the dead. You see it is precisely because of his resurrection that we know anything about Him. And what came to be written about Him, both in scripture and elsewhere, has no compare. Jesus’ resurrection changed the world forever. Human existence was no longer as it once seemed. A change in relationship, once and for all, had occurred between God and mankind. Jesus’ resurrection had inaugurated the life of the world to come.

Last week Fr. Lewis inspired us too to be “all in,” for at that moment we declare ourselves “all in”, we realize that salvation does not have a waiting period or require restitution. Life is changed forever. Life becomes forever.

This week our first reading from 2nd Maccabees expands, in quite graphic terms, what it means to be “all in.” The brothers Maccabee and their mother witness to their faith and love of God with their dying breaths.

You see back then, the government made it mandatory to worship Zeus as the supreme god. This meant a makeover for Jerusalem’s temple with Zeus having his own special altar built over top of the Jewish people’s sacred altar. And if that wasn’t wicked enough, the makeover team had chosen Jerusalem’s temple as the site of the first sacrifice to Zeus. Twice in the book of Daniel (11:31; 12:11) this is decried as “the abomination of desolation in the holy place.”

But the Jewish people would not lie down, they would not go quietly. A 3-year long revolt ensued. The Maccabee family never gave up on their belief in an afterlife of happiness with God for the just person. Their personal witness gave encouragement to many faithful Jews in an increasingly hostile religious environment. Eventually Judaism reigned victorious, and the temple was rededicated. This rededication of the Jerusalem Temple is in fact the origin of the Jewish feast of Hanukkah.
Today, we can be consoled knowing that resurrection is no longer just a belief. As Christians we know that Jesus rose from the dead. It happened. It is no myth. We have overwhelming historical, scriptural, and spiritual evidence proving He is alive and living among us. Just ask someone to share one of their God-stories with you.

It’s nothing new that our world laughs at us for believing in resurrection. Some of the Jewish faithful in Jesus’ day also had their doubts. We need look no further than the Sadducees in today’s Gospel.

Unlike other Jews the Sadducees rejected outright the concept of resurrection. This is why they are sad, do you see? They believed only what was clearly written in the Pentateuch, the first 5 books of our Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Pentateuch didn’t reference resurrection, so the rule-ridden, rule-driven Sadducees didn’t accept it either.

Today’s Gospel story finds a group of these Sadducees trying to trick Jesus into denying the reality of resurrection by the absurd situation of woman who’s been married 7 times.

Their narrow-mindedness stemmed from a law of course, written in the Pentateuch which allowed for the marriage of a widow to her deceased husband’s brother.

With “proof text” memorized, the Sadducees approach Jesus seeking his embarrassment. Jesus is not about to get sucked into the Sadducees’ fantasy world of the afterlife. Those Sadducees are so darn headstrong, so boxed in by “this age”, they can’t contemplate life beyond resurrection, where there is no more dying and thus no more need for the sexual relationships we know hold so dear.

In time, Jesus showed the apostles something radically new. It wasn’t another apparition of a prophet like Moses or Elijah. It wasn’t finding the occupant of an empty tomb alive and well. It wasn’t immortality or reincarnation. It wasn’t hallucinations, zombies, or Muhammad’s later promises of earthly rewards of food and sex in heaven. It was something altogether different, and oh so much better.

The man who had but a rare passing historical mention was no longer an unremarkable carpenter’s son. Jesus the Christ had risen from the grave as witness once and for all for the depth of God’s love for us.

You see when God has a relationship with someone, nothing – not even death – can destroy that relationship. Sure our earthly life will indeed pass away, this we know. But death will never end our relationship with God. We will remember all that is love - our wives, husbands, friends - in our relationship with God. Jesus’ resurrection on that
first Easter showed us this quite clearly. Death is a passage to resurrected life, a fuller and forever relationship with the God who loves us.

It is not by accident that we find ourselves a resurrected people, celebrating this eternal banquet of the Eucharist. Here we share in the fullness of God’s love, and an entirely new mode of existence, where marriage and present laws and traditions have no relevance. Where life takes on entirely new meaning.

Here at this table, we too witness Christ’s resurrection and our endless future of faith, hope, and love. So set aside those obstacles in our lives that interfere with God’s grace. Jesus Christ has shown us the Way and He’s counting on us to be “all in.” We don’t have to fear crossing over to the other side. We are on the other side already, because that’s where God’s love is living and active.

Go out and look into the eyes of the brokenhearted. Speak life to the deadest darkest night, so that the word of the Lord may run ahead of us and be glorified, as it has among you.

*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:38-39)*

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