

32nd Sunday of the Year (Year C)
(2 Maccabees 7:1-2,9-14 / Luke 20:27-38)
10.11.2013

Resurrection

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today's readings are an opportunity for us to reflect upon **the resurrection of the dead** which is a mystery at the very centre of our faith. We profess belief in the resurrection of Jesus, and we see it as the first fruits of our own resurrection.

The temptation exists for us to reduce Jesus to a wise man who left us words of wisdom which help us to live not only an honest life, but lives of a high ethical standard. But the truth is that Jesus was not only a wise man; Jesus is God made man who came into the world to save us: Jesus is more than a wise man; He is our Saviour. More precisely, Jesus lived through his passion, death **and resurrection** to set us free from death and reconcile us with the Father by the forgiveness of our sins. These are all things that Jesus could not do if he were only a wise man. Jesus is risen from the dead. He is the Risen Lord. He is our Saviour.

St Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians: "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ cannot have been raised either; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is without substance, and so is your faith" (1 Cor 15:12-14). St Paul's teaching cannot be clearer: the denial of the resurrection of the dead brings with it the denial of the particular case of the resurrection of Christ. Christ's resurrection is essential for us because it is the first fruits of our own forthcoming resurrection. If Christ is not risen, we shall not rise. Death will have the last word in our lives, and our sins are not forgiven. None of the aspects of the Christian message and of the faith which corresponds to it makes sense except in function of its central reality: the Resurrection of Christ. Without the resurrection of Christ, everything collapses.

What do we know about the resurrection? What can we say about it?

In today's gospel, the Sadducees presume that Jesus' idea of the resurrection is the one commonly held: namely, that the human condition will persist in the next world with some agreeable extras. Following their presumption, the Sadducees put a question to Jesus with the purpose of ridiculing his belief in the resurrection. They recall the law on levirate marriage which stated that if a man dies and has no son, that is to say no legal heir, his brother must marry the widow and the first son whom she bears shall be heir to the name of his brother who is dead (Dt 25:5); thus the continuity of the family line is guaranteed. Then the Sadducees develop an example to the point of absurdity. Suppose there were seven brothers each of whom marries the same woman, but each of whom dies childless. None of the brothers has proved himself a husband in terms of producing an heir: in that case, whose wife would the woman be in the resurrection?

In his reply Jesus makes it clear that there is no comparison between human life shared by all here and now and the resurrection shared by those who are the sons and daughters of God. If men and women marry here and now, it is to have children and keep their names alive after death through these children. Whereas those who will be raised from the dead will not die again later on and so do not need to marry in order to have children to keep their names alive through their posterity. What Jesus points out is that the Sadducees are completely mistaken. They have gotten it all wrong.

If the resurrected life promised to us is not the improved continuity of our human life, what is it then? When we confess in the creed that we wait for the resurrection of the body, we confess that **our body of flesh is destined to become a glorious body**. To understand properly that affirmation of our faith, it is important to distinguish between “**the body that we have**”, a body made of bones, flesh and muscles, blood and water, and “**the body that we are**”, a living body with a history, a style, a gait, a tonality in the voice, in one word a singularity that says who we are. “The body that we are” is made up of the web of all our human relationships. Of course the body we have and the body we are are inseparable. We cannot be in relationship with one another except through our bodies of flesh and blood. Our human body is destined to become a **glorious** body. In Hebrew, the word used for “glory” contains within it the idea of weight or density; it is something which has some weight. In our lives, what has real weight is **love, love given and received, time shared with others, words that give life to others and raise them up, words that forgive**. This is the body that will rise from the dead and will live for ever: all our acts of love and all our life giving words.

That promise of the resurrection made to us begins here and now. To quote Maurice Zundel: “The point is not to know if we shall be alive after death, but if we are alive before death”. Zundel means: If we love here and now, we shall live for ever after our death. And I would add: the point is not to know how we shall live after death; this is a matter for God and we know and believe that our God is a God of surprises, a God who will not disappoint us! The real point is how we live here and now!