

Resurrection of the Body

2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14
Psalm 17
2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5
Luke 20:27-38

The Chinese Boxer Rebellion of 1900 A.D. was not about one particular issue. However, one of the main issues was the desire to eliminate Christian influence on Chinese society. During the Rebellion, some members of the Rebel party surrounded a Christian mission school and barricaded all gates and doors except one. Then they placed a cross in front of the open threshold and instructed the students to trample the cross on their way out. Anyone who denied their Christian faith by trampling the cross would live, while those who did not would be shot. The first seven students chose to trample on the cross and went free. The next student, a teenage girl, came out, knelt before the cross in reverence, rose and stepped around it. She was immediately gunned down. The next ninety-two students were inspired by the teenager's courageous example and likewise stepped around the cross and accepted death instead of denying their faith in Jesus Christ.

It is hard to imagine such amazing faith and courage! Even at a young age, those Chinese students understood the *big picture of life*—that life on earth will end for every single one of us, but our hope is in the eternal life that Jesus Christ won for us through His death and Resurrection. While it is hard to imagine the faith and courage of those teenage martyrs, it is even harder to imagine the hopelessness of those who don't believe in the Resurrection of the dead, like the Sadducees.

In the time of Christ, there were three main sects in the Jewish religion—the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. The two most prominent in the New Testament were the Pharisees and Sadducees. The main difference between these two types of Jews was that the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the body after death, while the Sadducees did not. I had a teacher years ago who told me that the easiest way to remember which sect did not believe in the resurrection was to think of their name as meaning, it's "Sad, you see" (Sadducee).

In our Gospel reading today, the Sadducees were attempting to ensnare Jesus in a theological web. They were hoping to get Him to admit that resurrection is impossible. First, they quote Moses as a way to add weight to their argument. Then, they offer a conundrum—in heaven, whose wife would a woman be who had been legitimately married to seven men on earth? Rather than seeing the hypothetical scenario as a problem, Jesus used it to teach the crowd about heaven. He explained that in heaven there will be no marriage. Then, Jesus Himself quoted Moses in order to add weight to His argument for the reality of the resurrection of the body and the existence of heaven.

As Christians, we believe in the resurrection of the body—we reaffirm our faith in this reality at every Mass when we pray the Creed. It is a central concept to our faith. Today, our Gospel reading gives us an opportunity to reflect on what the resurrection of the body means for us as Christians, both practically and spiritually. Let me first mention some of the practical considerations about the resurrection of our bodies.

Resurrection is not the same as resuscitation. We can see from the stories about the Resurrected Christ, that His Resurrected body was noticeably different, yet similar, to His earthly body. Three particular characteristics of our resurrected bodies—identity, entirety, and immortality—remind us that resurrection is different than mere resuscitation. These three characteristics will be common to the risen bodies of the just as well as the wicked. “Identity” means that our resurrected bodies will be OUR bodies and not someone else’s body (some of us might be a bit discouraged by this while others will be delighted!). “Entirety” means that our resurrected bodies will be complete and perfect. We will not have the same deficiencies and imperfections that we experienced here on earth (that’s great news for ALL of us!). And, lastly, “immortality” means that we will never die again.

In addition to these three qualities that ALL people will share after death, there are four qualities that the Church mentions that only the *just* will possess in their resurrected bodies. They are—“impassibility,” meaning that no pain or inconvenience will hinder our resurrected bodies.¹ The next quality is “glory,” which is a sign of God’s favor.² It is described in Scripture as a *brightness* displayed by God’s saints and varying in degrees.³ The third quality is “agility,” in which the body shall be freed to move with great quickness. This is based on the theological reality that eternity exists outside of the concept of time. Without the restriction of time, we experience a freedom of movement, hence the reason why the saints and angels can be spoken of as being in all places at once. The last quality is “subtlety,” or “subtlety,” by which the soul’s perfection absorbs the body and makes it similar to a spirit. An example of this would be the fact that the Resurrected Christ was able to pass through material objects.

Spiritually, the resurrection of our bodies gives us courage. We live in a broken world where our sin, disease, and accidents make life very difficult and painful. However, as Christians, we know that our earthly life is not the end. **Faith in the resurrection of the body gives us the courage to get through the difficulties of our earthly lives**, even to the point of martyrdom, as we saw with the young people in the Chinese Boxer Rebellion.

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

✚ Read 1 Corinthians 15:39-44. What gets stirred up in your heart as you read Paul’s words regarding resurrection of the body?

✚ In the Mass Preface for Christian Death I⁴ we read:

In him, who rose from the dead, our hope of resurrection dawned.
The sadness of death gives way to the bright promise of immortality.
Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended.
When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death
we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven.

Share with God what these words mean to you. What parts of the quote are easy to believe? What parts are the most difficult to believe?

¹ See 1 Corinthians 15:42

² See 1 Corinthians 15:43; cf. Matthew 13:43; 17:2; Philippians 3:21

³ See 1 Corinthians 15:39-44

⁴ Preface 77. Excerpt from the English translation of the *Roman Missal* © 1973, International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc. (ICEL). All rights reserved.