

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend's readings are about *resurrection*. Remember that *in Jesus* we have the promise of resurrection at the end of time. Just to clarify, when Jesus (and anyone in the Scriptures) speaks of *resurrection*, he means that the *body* is raised up. This is the definition of resurrection. The Apostles' Creed reminds us of this when we say, I believe "in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting." Sometimes we think that going to heaven means we will finally be free of our bodies. The reality is that to be completely human, we are body and soul – an ensouled body, or an embodied soul. While we believe in the immortality of the soul (that the soul exists beyond the life of the body), we know that a soul separated from the body is not fully itself, not fully human (hence every ghost story). We also believe that at the end of time, when Jesus comes again at the last judgment, our bodies will rise and we will again be fully human – body and soul united – now with "glorified" bodies. These will be something like Jesus' resurrected body – something the same (Jesus still had the nail marks in His hands and feet, as well as the spear thrust in His side), but something different (He was able to walk through locked doors, and His disciples often did not recognize Him at first).

The first reading from II Maccabees tells of the "pre-Jesus" belief in the resurrection. The Greeks had invaded Israel and were forcing their pagan culture on the monotheistic Jews. Some resisted to the point of torture and death. We hear (in part) about a woman with seven sons who were tortured because they wouldn't eat pork, a food forbidden to the Jews. As the second brother is being tortured and killed, he says,

"You accursed fiend, you are depriving us of this present life, but the King of the world will raise us up to live again forever. It is for his laws that we are dying." (II Mac 7:9, emphasis added)

When the third brother has his tongue and hands cut off, he says

"It was from Heaven that I received these; for the sake of his laws I disdain them; from him I hope to receive them again." (II Mac 7:11)

When they kill the fourth brother, he says

"It is my choice to die at the hands of men with the hope God gives of being raised up by him; but for you, there will be no resurrection to life." (II Mac 7:14)

The great courage of these brothers and their mother (if you read the whole passage in the Bible), points to the reason for their hope – the resurrection. Their belief in God's fidelity to His promises is absolute. They experience intense suffering and death, losing parts of their bodies, with the firm knowledge that they will receive them back from God. Again, this is before Jesus came and rose again! They knew that there was something more than this world, and their daily lives reflected it.

Do we have such faith? I'm not talking about being martyred, but do we allow our faith in God to go out of the doors of the church and effect how we live, how we interact with people, how we do business, how we drive, how we raise our children, how we shop, what we watch, how we take care of the poor and our world?

In the Gospel, Jesus encounters the Sadducees (the priestly class that offered sacrifice in the Temple: they did not believe in the resurrection). They pose an "impossible" question to Jesus about the impossibility of there being a resurrection: a woman is married to seven brothers (in accord with the Levitical law, because each died childless) – whose wife will she be in the resurrection? Jesus answers that in the resurrection there will be no marriage. Why not? Marriage is a sign pointing to something greater (see Eph 5:32) – the marriage between Christ and His Church (us).

I have said this before, but I'll say it again: the summary of the Bible is "**God wants to marry us.**" The Bible starts with a marriage (Adam and Eve in Genesis) and ends with a marriage (the Wedding Feast of the Lamb in Revelation), and smack dab in the middle is erotic love poetry (the Song of Songs). This is because the whole of our life on earth is about God proposing to us. Heaven is when we fully accept this invitation and become Jesus' "Bride".

Jesus tells us there is no more marriage in the age to come, not because marriage is bad, but because it is a sign pointing to a reality greater than itself – the marriage between God and us. When we have the reality, we no longer need the sign. It's like when you're trying to find the exit – you may need the sign to point you to it, but you don't want the sign, you want the reality. Everything good and beautiful and desirable about marriage is a sign of how God loves us – the intimacy, the tenderness, the fulfillment. All love will be *perfected* in Heaven (so we will love our spouses... and everyone else... even more than we do now).

This is the promise of the resurrection – not only our bodies renewed, but every longing we have finally having ultimate fulfillment! May we truly focus how we live our lives on this incredible truth of God's love for us!