

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, C – November 6, 2016 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5:00pm Sat. and 8:30am Sunday Masses – 785 words

During this month of prayer for the faithful departed, the Church reminds us about a central dogma of our faith: the resurrection of the body. When a loved one dies there is usually an acute sense of loss, especially because of the fact that they are no longer physically present to us as they were before: we can no longer see, touch, or embrace them. Even while their souls still live, their bodily remains are buried and return to the dust of the earth. Their souls are judged and go to their reward while awaiting the last day, when their bodies will be raised also. And we who remain should continually pray for them in expectation of that day.

The doctrine of the resurrection is therefore a reminder to us of the importance of the body and even of its moral value. What we do in our bodies here on earth matters, for they are ours not only for this life here but also for eternity. What we do in our bodies matters also because of the fact of that reward that I just spoke of: we will have our bodies in heaven and so experience the bliss of heaven also in a physical way; or, God forbid, our bodies could be in hell, and so experience the unspeakable pains of that dreadful place in a physical manner also.

Thus, one of the seven brothers in the first reading said to his executioners: “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” – that is, unless they repented, not only their souls would go to suffer in the death of hellfire but also, ultimately, their bodies. We ask the good God to deliver us all from such a fate, helping us to undergo conversion of life, living and dying in his saving grace. Thus St. Paul prayed in the second reading: “May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the endurance of Christ.”

The Sadducees in the gospel crafted a very clever yet rather absurd case in order to disprove the resurrection. Jesus easily overcame their guile; and, if any doubt remained after his response, he would later show them in the first person the truth of the resurrection, when he submitted himself to death for their sins and for all of ours, and then rose again on the third day. Indeed, our own future experience of resurrection is only possible because of Christ’s resurrection. We were made partakers of it through baptism, when we began to have his risen life in our souls. St. Paul, in one of his letters, speaks of it as being “hidden with Christ in God”.¹

Yes, our lives were hidden in, or incorporated into, Christ’s life from the moment of our baptism. A question for each of us is whether that life is evident in our own: Is the way I live in soul and body compatible with the life of Christ? We all fail, but he offers us the possibility of a new beginning each time. In the traditional Act of Contrition we protest sorrow for our sin because of “the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, but most of all because” of having offended God, “who are all good and worthy of all [our] love”. That “most of all” is really a key phrase in that prayer. I have warned you about the pains of hell as is my duty, but if they are all that motivate us to do good and avoid evil, then we are not fully living!

And so we return to St. Paul’s exhortation from the second reading: “May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the endurance of Christ”. Our task, which is only possible with the help of God’s grace, is to persevere in his love. Do you meditate on God’s love? Do you reflect on how that love has been manifested in your life and the lives of those around you? Do you strive to make sacrifices and “gifts” to God out of love for him? Do you ever ask yourself if this or that moral choice is compatible with the love of God? When we regularly meditate on this all-surpassing love, it moves us to live more fully in a way that befits not only the reward of heaven but also the resurrection of the body to the life of heaven. So remember that “most of all” from the Act of Contrition, and strive to let God’s love guide you each day of your life.

¹ Colossians 3:3