

Thereafter

6 11 16

Almighty Father,
whose will it is to restore all things
in your beloved Son, the king of all;
govern the hearts and minds of those in authority,
and bring the family of the nations,
divided and torn apart by the ravages of sin,
to be subject to his just and gentle rule.

Our text may be found in today's gospel and is Luke chapter 20 and verse 38:

**'He is the God, not of the dead, but of the living;
for to him all of them are alive.'**

Last Sunday, we celebrated All Saints' Day, Toussaints. Last Thursday, we remembered, All Souls' Day and prayed for the repose of the souls of the faithful departed. Today, I'd like to ask the question – do you believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come ?

One of the things that I personally find most attractive about Christianity, especially as I'm getting that little bit nearer the milestone of three score year and ten, is our belief in life after death. Of course, that belief is not unique to us – it is a feature of many world religions, though they would differ on how best to understand what it to come. But one of the promises that Jesus makes to us is

the possibility that we will still exist after we die, that though our body and flesh will fail, our spirit, our soul, our identity, will continue after we are raised from the dead on the day of the general resurrection.

Okay, not everyone believes that life will go on after we die. A dear friend and former colleague of mine, who is still teaching at Dame Alice Owen's School, only a fortnight ago shared her doubts and uncertainty about the possibility of a life after death.

And in today's gospel passage, Jesus is challenged by some Sadducees, some of the priestly class who had a very conservative view of Judaism which did not embrace the relatively 'modern' idea of life after death that the Pharisees believed in. So they try to trip Jesus up with a question about whose wife a seven-times childless widow would be once she gets to heaven. Don't you love it? Seven brothers – one bride! Each, according to the Law of Moses marries her in turn and then each in turn dies. No child is born to any of them. So in heaven whose wife is she? Nice one! But Jesus trumps them by simply saying you haven't understood the nature of heaven – no marriage there so no problem.

But the point surely is not whether there is marriage in heaven but whether we can live even after we die. Instinctively, I feel the answer is yes. Intuitively, I believe the answer is yes. Oddly enough, even after all these years since my parents' death, I still cherish their memory and hear their words of advice – I rarely go to bed without first doing the washing up and my shoes are usually well polished!

And here, surely, is the point that Jesus is making when he points the Sadducees to a passage in the book of Exodus where Moses has a God-encounter, a theophany if you like technical terms. At the burning bush, where Moses is told to take off his shoes because he is standing on holy ground, God says to Moses that he is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. These three patriarchs have clearly died but to God they are alive. God remembers them; he holds them in love; they are not forgotten, lost in the dark, but live in the light.

So let me end by encouraging you to remember today's text:

‘He is the God, not of the dead, but of the living;
for to him all of them are alive.’

It is an encouraging thought that though we all must die, to God our Father, we his children are still remembered, are still living, alive in his love.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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