

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Last Sunday we heard how we are accounted saints, holy, righteous, and blessed through faith in Christ Jesus. Today our focus is in our hope of everlasting life. “I believe ... in the resurrection of the body, and the life ✠ everlasting,” we confess as we conclude the Apostles’ Creed.

This confession is in the creed ... that means that the resurrection of the body is no insignificant, “take it or leave it” doctrine of the Church. St. Paul told us that Jesus’ resurrection is a teaching “*of first importance*” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). And from it we have the hope of our own resurrection. “[B]y a man [Jesus] has come also the resurrection of the dead ... in Christ shall all be made alive ... Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor. 15:21-23). Our hope in Christ is not for this life only; our hope of everlasting life is not for a ghostly eternity as spirit only; our hope, though unseen, is for “*the redemption of our bodies*” (Rom. 8:23). God “*who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you*” (Rom. 8:11).

All that comes from the New Testament, but you know well the Scripture from Job in the Old Testament: “*I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me*” (Job 19:25-27). And consider what the prophet Isaiah wrote: “*Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead*” (Isa. 26:19). We confess it; we do sing for joy because of it.

Of course, people today dismiss this Biblical teaching, mocking it as unscientific and ridiculing us for believing such unenlightened myths. We don’t care about their mockery and ridicule. They are the unenlightened ones. After all, this attitude is nothing new. In fact, this attitude is on full display in our Gospel today.

Now Luke in chapter 20 describes Jesus as being in a pitched battle with His religious opponents as He is in Jerusalem preparing for His sacrificial death and resurrection. The attacks start with “*the chief priests and the scribes with the elders*” (Luke 20:1). “By what authority do you “*drive out those who*” are selling? Who gave you this authority?” (Luke 19:45; Luke 20:2) Jesus foils that attack with a question back to them — they refused to answer.

Jesus is challenged again, this time by some “*spies*” sent from the “*scribes and the chief priests*” who feign sincerity so that they might trip Jesus up (Luke 20:19-20). “*Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?*” Jesus deflects this attack by showing them a coin with Caesar’s image and instructing them to “*render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s*” (Luke 20:25).

Now, these attacks come from both the scribes (of the Pharisees party) and the chief priests (of the Sadducees party). But then the Sadducees decide to try on their own — that's the encounter in our Gospel for today.

The Sadducees devise this little hypothetical question about the resurrection. They didn't really want to know. As Luke reported, they didn't believe in the resurrection anyway (or angels or spirits – Acts 23:8). Their question bordered on the absurd. There were seven brothers. One brother married and died childless, leaving his wife. According to Moses, a man's brother should take his deceased brother's childless wife to himself, that he might give her a child (Deut. 25:5). So his brother did according to the law and took the woman as wife, but he similarly died without giving her a child. The same happened with the rest of the brothers. Eventually, she died. Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?

Jesus doesn't flinch. He isn't daunted by this theological conundrum. He doesn't answer sheepishly: "Gosh, I don't know; let me think about it." No, Matthew records, He forthrightly tells the Sadducees: "*You are wrong.*" You're wrong about the resurrection. You're wrong about marriage. You're wrong about angels. You're wrong "*because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God*" (Matt. 22:29). You don't understand the difference between temporal life now in this age and eternal life in the age to come.

And it's true: we don't know a lot about eternal life and resurrected life in paradise. We heard last Sunday that in the bliss of eternity there will be "*hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; ... nor any scorching heat*" (Rev. 7:16). We're also told "*death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore.*" "[God] will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes" (Rev. 21:4). We know that.

Jesus told the Sadducees: "*The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age — [to eternal life] and to the resurrection from the dead, [they] neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.*" So Jesus tweaks the Sadducees saying that in the resurrection we're equal to angels ... because they neither believed in the resurrection or in angels.

But it's especially what He teaches about marriage that piques our interest, I think. In the resurrection, we neither marry nor are given in marriage. We may think that odd, since God instituted marriage in Paradise, before the fall into sin. He did it for our good — that man might not be alone; and He did it for the good of mankind, to fill the earth and exercise dominion over it. So, marriage is a good gift of God for our sake here on earth, for the sake of our families, our children.

Of course, in our sinful corruption, we can mess anything up, and we do that also in marriage with out-of-wedlock sexual encounters, adulterous affairs, unfaithfulness,

divorce, homosexual marriage. Lord have mercy upon us — and He does as we acknowledged in the collect today: “Living God, Your almighty power is made known chiefly in showing mercy and pity.” The Living God has had mercy on us through the marriage of His own Son the Bridegroom with us His Bride, the Church.

For in this heavenly marriage, God gives us a picture of what true love is, what faithfulness really is, what sacrifice means — what our own marriages should be like, but never fully attain because of sin. And ultimately, sin-caused death does part us. After that, Jesus says, no more marrying, no more being given in marriage. Why? He says it’s because we can’t die any more, because we’re sons of God, and we’re sons of the resurrection. In the resurrection, we have received the life promised us, in fellowship with our Bridegroom — that’s the relationship that truly matters. We still look forward to the heavenly reunion with those we know and love who died in the faith, this is true, as we await the resurrection, but especially, we look forward to eternal communion with Jesus, with the Father and the Holy Spirit. May the Lord keep us in this hope until that day.

For “that day” is coming, when the dead shall rise from their graves. When is a mystery, but the fact is a promise sure: *“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality”* (1 Cor. 15:51-53).

I went to Paul for this cardinal doctrine on the resurrection and earlier to Job and Isaiah. But Jesus, knowing the Sadducees — that all they received were the five books of Moses and not the rest of our Old Testament — pointed them to Moses. And from him, Jesus proved the resurrection — that God is the God of the living and not of the dead. For Moses before the burning bush heard the LORD say, *“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”* Not I was — though these patriarchs were long dead — but I am their God. For though these patriarchs died, yet do they live through faith in the offspring promised to them and who would come through them. Beloved in Christ, what is true for them is true for all of us who *“live to him”* — though we die, yet shall we live through faith in the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25).

Therefore, God grant to us that we hold fast to this central doctrine of the Christian church even as we confessed it moments ago in the Nicene Creed: “I look for the resurrection of the dead, And the life ✠ of the world to come.”

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.