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Experiencing resurrection

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez | Nov. 9, 2013 Spiritual Reflections

At first reading, it may seem that there is little connection between the first reading and the Gospel. The Maccabees text reports on the successive deaths of seven sons and their mother, each of whom died as a martyr for their faith. In the Gospel, the Levirate law governs the conversation between Jesus and some Sadducees. This law provided for the marriage of a widow to her deceased husband's brother to ensure the continuance of the family line (see Deuteronomy 25:5; Genesis 38:8). But at the heart of both of these sacred texts is the reality of resurrection (or the non-reality of it, depending on one's beliefs).

Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14
Psalm 17
2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5
Luke 20:27-38

Clearly, the brothers Maccabee and their mother had profound faith, and died professing it. Their faith invites us to examine our own. They believed that the just would live forever. Yet while the doctrine of an afterlife and of personal resurrection developed within Judaism around their time, 200 B.C., it was not universally accepted. As we see in today's Gospel, the very idea of resurrection remained a matter of debate and was the source of many theological confrontations among Jesus' contemporaries. Walter Brueggemann warns us against trivializing this great gift of God (*Reverberations of Faith*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2002). Resurrection is more than a feel-good belief about seeing loved ones again, says Brueggemann. A biblical sense of the resurrection of the dead should focus on the indomitable power and faithfulness of God in the face of every negation, including the ultimate negation of death. Although death is lamentable, there must also be an element of celebration in every death, for it is not the end but a new beginning that has no end. It is significant that almost every prayer of lament in the Psalter includes a movement from defeat to victory; from a plea for pity to praise for the God whose power over death and life is absolute.

In her book *Resurrection*, Pheme Perkins affirms that the truth of resurrection allows Jesus' followers to emerge as a new faith community (Doubleday, 1984). That community's claim that salvation has been realized through the cross and resurrection of Jesus also led to new formulations about God. In the sacred texts, resurrection is represented as the apex of the biblical saga of salvation, beginning with human need and culminating in God's deliverance from every evil, even death. Perkins also insists that resurrection is not merely an assertion in the creed, but it is the condition for the emergence of Christian speech itself. To put it another way, were it not for the Resurrection, we Christians would have nothing to say to the world.

But Jesus has risen, and so shall we rise because of him; therefore, we have a message that cannot go unheard. Resurrection makes it possible to live in hope and to trust in the future. Like so many of God's good gifts, the experience of resurrection should not be relegated to eternity. On the contrary, resurrection, like salvation, should be tasted here and now. As Pope Paul VI noted in his encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, salvation is existential. It is both this-worldly and eschatological or otherworldly. Salvation involves justice, that is, action toward reform of the oppressive forces and structures in society. Salvation is liberation from the concrete and historic forces of oppression. Everything said here about salvation also applies to resurrection. To experience Jesus' resurrection means that the poor are lifted up out of poverty, the lonely are raised and restored to community, the sick are elevated to health. For those who suffer injustices and disadvantages of every kind, we will raise our voices and vote our consciences until they too are lifted up.

Resurrection means feeding the hungry and housing the homeless; it means visiting the imprisoned and witnessing to the good news with our lips and our lives. Resurrection, like salvation, is both existential and eschatological. While we await the one who has died and risen so that we, too, may pass through death to eternal life, we are to devote ourselves, our time, our talent and whatever treasure we possess so that all can know the experience of resurrection.

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