

Resurrection depends on our relationship with God

Thomas Gumbleton | Nov. 14, 2013 The Peace Pulpit

During the month of November, we often turn our thoughts to those who have gone before us into everlasting life. We start the month with the Feast of All Saints, where we remember those who enjoy the fullness of life in heaven -- our family, friends, those who have gone before us -- and the second day of November, the Feast of All Souls, where we remember those who perhaps are not yet experiencing the fullness of that everlasting life.

There's a very beautiful part in the letter to the Hebrews that reminds us of this. The author begins to list people of faith down through the centuries, one after the other -- multitudes -- and then finally says, "What a cloud of innumerable witnesses surround us. So let us be rid of every encumbrance, and especially those who are running the race marked out before us." So it's a call to enter into this cloud of witnesses, those who have gone from this life through death to everlasting life.

If we listen carefully to today's Scriptures, our conviction in that everlasting life -- confidence in resurrection, going through death to new life -- will be strengthened. This is a part of the history of the chosen people that is only a century or so before Jesus, and so by his time, the understanding of resurrection has become more accepted within Jewish theology.

So the mother watches as her seven sons, one after the other, is tortured and put to death, and she reassures them. Even the last son ... pleaded with his mother, urged him to act against the law so he can save his life and the mother said, "No." Much as she wanted not to lose her son, she did not want him to fail to live according to God's law.

So all seven died, and the mother was able to accept it because they were confident as they proclaimed to their torturer, their killer, that God raises up those who go through death to new life in God, and so there's very beautiful, powerful expression of resurrection.

However, this is not totally common in the understanding of the Jewish people. Their faith life constantly evolved to say God is being revealed more and more fully down through the centuries to humankind, and in this case especially, to the Jewish people.

So even at the time of Jesus, there were those who rejected the idea of any afterlife, and among them were this group, the ones called the Sadducees, who were really the priests, the temple of priests, as opposed to the Pharisees, who were laypeople like Jesus. (And for the most part, the Pharisees accepted resurrection.)

So these Sadducees come to Jesus and are going to challenge him on this belief and resurrection. They do it by almost making a mockery of the teaching because in the book of Leviticus, the law of part of the Torah, it's pointed out, as the Sadducees tell Jesus, that if a man dies without a child, then his brother must take his wife to become the brother's wife and bear a son in the name of the one who died.

That's a responsibility so that the name would not die out in history. So they make what seems almost a ridiculous scenario: Seven brothers each die, no son is ever born, and [they] said, "OK, who's going to be the

author begins to list people of faith down through the centuries, one after the other -- multitudes -- and then finally says, "What a cloud of innumerable witnesses surround us. So let us be rid of every encumbrance, and especially those who are running the race marked out before us." So it's a call to enter into this cloud of witnesses, those who have gone from this life through death to everlasting life.

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time
2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14
Psalms 17:1, 5-6, 8, 15
1 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5
First of John 1:7-10
Solomon's readings

husband of this woman in the resurrection?"

Well, Jesus quickly dismisses their argument because he also goes back to the Torah -- the part of the Scriptures that the Sadducees accepted, and they did not accept the later books -- and from the Torah in the book of Exodus, Jesus reminds them of the time when God is revealed to Moses and God proclaims, "I am the god of Abraham, the god of Isaac, and the god of Jacob."

In the Gospel where it says, "For God is God of the living and not of the dead," in the Hebrew Scriptures, in the book of Exodus, God is saying, "I am the god now of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." They're dead, but they're alive in God because God is their God, and they are God's chosen ones -- God's people.

So Jesus makes it clear there is resurrection, and this is the truth that we can embrace with great confidence today as we think about those that have gone before us, but also about our own death, that we will be passing through death to new life, and we get a sense of what it depends upon: It's our relationship with God.

See, that's a relationship that started because God drew us out of nothingness, caused us to be and to share life. God sustains us every moment we're alive, every moment we're present in creation, but then that relationship with God doesn't end because God is forever. So if we establish our relationship with God in this life as we go through death, our relationship with God continues, and we share everlasting life with God.

A very comforting and beautiful teaching for us, especially if we have experienced the loss of someone very precious to us. I know, just from my own very recent experience. My nephew and his wife lost their 24-year-old son in a terrible accident, and their grief is almost unimaginable. And yet, through it all, they can have the confidence -- and they do -- that their son, David, is living now with God.

They miss him dramatically, tremendously, but they have that deep confidence, and this is the gift that comes to all of us who have come to embrace our belief in God through Jesus, who reveals God to us and who himself went through death to new life.

As we continue to remember those who have gone before us throughout this month of November -- but even after that, but we do it especially during November -- we can do it with great confidence that they are with God. They're part of this cloud of witnesses.

Then to continue to strengthen us, perhaps we can go back to our second lesson today and repeat to ourselves the prayer that the author of that letter to the Thessalonians offers: "May Christ Jesus our Lord who has loved us, may God, our creator who in God's mercy gives us everlasting comfort -- comfort and true hope -- strengthen us. May God encourage our hearts, make us steadfast in every good work and word."

That prayer can be fulfilled because we truly have confidence that God is a God of the living, not a God of the dead. So Jesus, who has loved us, and God, who shows mercy to us, will continue to give us everlasting comfort, true hope, and strength, and make our hearts steadfast at every good work and word as we move forward to everlasting life with God.

[Homily given at St. Leo Church, Detroit. The transcripts of Bishop Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) [2] to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]

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