

HOMILY SUNDAY 32-C
“Children of the Resurrection”
(2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14; Psalm 17; 2 Thes 2:16-3:5; Luke 20:27-38)

An elderly lady spent much time each day reading the bible. A visitor commented on that one day. Her grandchild responded, “Yes, she does that a lot. I think she’s cramming for the finals.”

Live life to the full: have faith and live as a child of the resurrection

In November, 2004, I received a call in the middle of the night from my sister-in-law in Toronto. My brother Louis, her husband, had suddenly become ill on a trip to visit my niece and was now in a coma. The doctors told her that he had a fifty-fifty chance to survive an operation for an aggressive cancerous brain tumour. She asked me to pray hard as he went into the operation. I did so that night with the psalms and the rosary until I felt a kind of certitude that he would make it. He did and that began the long road to recovery. I flew to Toronto as soon as I could to help the family and spend a few nights at his bedside. Those hours remain precious moments in my memory, sharing in Louis’ pain and fear of death; bonding intimately as brothers, trying to bring hope to him from the scriptures and our shared faith. That experience, I realize, has changed me, deepened my own faith and made me more aware of the power and relevance of the resurrection.

The Word of God today speaks strongly of faith in the resurrection, in “everlasting renewal of life.” The gospel invites us to be “children of the resurrection,” for even the dead are alive to God.

Saying “yes” to eternal life is stamped on the very souls of Christians. With Christ in our hearts we can live fully, acting for the sake of justice and the well-being of others. Living this mystery of dying and rising with Christ, as family, community and with the alienated, reflects a profound hope to all around us. We are mirroring a glimpse of eternal life that we can share with the world.

According to Corbin Eddy in his commentary on this passage, at the time of Christ, resurrection was a very important statement and not just a carrot at the end of a stick, an eternal reward for good behaviour. Rather, it affirmed God’s goodness and God’s justice, which are greater than anything we can imagine. In the end, there can be no justice for some of the atrocities that humans do to other humans. The resurrection of the dead affirms that there is another level of life. It affirms that there is a place where God is God, and where God’s absolute truth, justice and love will finally be manifested. Karl Marx was wrong when he claimed that this sort of vision is an opiate for people. In fact, it is just the opposite. It energizes. Jesus goes to his death believing absolutely in God’s goodness, believing that love is stronger than death. He is energized by this faith to give absolutely everything he is; it doesn’t dull his sensitivity to what is going on around him. Rather, it energizes him for death and for life. Christ’s resurrection stands as the permanent affirmation and truth of God for all who seek true justice and true peace.

Eddy claims that the point of heaven, the afterlife, the resurrection, is the absolute affirmation of God's goodness, God's justice, God's truth. Death is not the end. Even a horrifying, brutal rape and murder cannot be a complete, absolute disaster. For believers, there must be something more. There must be another way of affirming life, and redeeming, saving, grasping and embracing persons. That's heaven, that's the resurrection; that is God's final judgement. The texts about the resurrection stand as a permanent reminder to all of us that what we see, isn't all there is. Our own weak efforts to make a just and wonderful world don't happen in a vacuum. God is at work in these efforts, and in the dying and rising of Jesus, God affirms and guarantees this absolute final truth.

Resurrection faith can transform our relationships with others, even after they have died – such is the power of love. As a teenager, young adult and even as a young priest, I had struggled in my relationship with my father. It took me fifteen years to learn to forgive him for his shortcomings and to let go of the anger I self-righteously harboured towards him (of course I thought I was right all along). Finally, in an almost miraculous way, I was able to come to my senses, deal with my anger, forgive my father, and was reconciled with him two years before he died. I am grateful for that experience that helped me to truly celebrate his funeral.

Years later, however, a counsellor told me that acting out of anger towards my father was not the same as sitting down with my dad and sharing my feelings of anger with him. With a shock, I suddenly realized that I had never done that. Sure, we had forgiven each other, had been reconciled, and had two good years where we could finally talk about many things without that old familiar tension between us, but we had never talked about “us”, about our relationship. I had never shared with him those strong emotions that I had felt for years towards him.

I instinctively knew what I had to do. I did a one day retreat, and wrote a letter to my dad, sharing all the feelings that I had never shared with him while he was alive. Then I read it out loud to a pillow on a chair representing my father and even shed a few tears. That same counsellor later asked me if it was now more like an “adult to adult” relationship with my dad and I reacted strongly to that question. That was exactly it – I had grown up. I was no longer the little boy and he the father; through that letter we were now friends. We had shared our feelings. For the first time in my life, eleven years after dad died, I had achieved intimacy with my father. On the way home, the world was somehow brighter and I was hit by a powerful awareness of the communion of saints: if I was healing in my relationship with my father down here because of that humble letter, then he was healing in his relationship with me. I was actually helping my father enter heaven! It doesn't get better than that.

Resurrection faith is not “re-incarnation” but faith in the power of God's love to transform us right here and now, through forgiveness, healing and acceptance. The psalm today tells us that we are to become the righteousness and likeness of God. We are to experience his peace, joy and justice of the Holy Spirit helping us to live lives that are free from fear

Jesus' death on the cross, quoting Psalm 22, feeling abandoned yet trusting in God totally, is a perfect example of resurrection faith. My brother Louis now has a deep desire to experience reconciliation, to make amends, mixed with regret he did not do more to love others in the past, yet hopeful that he can do so with the time that he has left on this earth.

The Eucharist that we now celebrate is an act of faith in the power of God's love to transform bread

and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus; and faith in the power of the Word to transform us into children of the resurrection.

So, live your life to the full. Have faith and live as children of the resurrection.