All who die believing in the Lord Jesus are Saints Triumphant

1. For they can no longer die
2. For God is the God of the living, not the dead

Many times you hear people say that nothing in life is certain except death and taxes. Death is the way of all life. I think of all the funerals I have conducted over the years and ones I have attend, each gives evidence that all of us will die, unless the Lord Jesus returns first. There is a tremendous difference the way the Christians mourn the death of a loved one dying in faith and how all mourn over the death of the unbeliever. For the believer, the funeral is a celebration of life, not so much the earthly life of the deceased, but the life eternal that dear brother or sister now lives with the Lord Jesus. For the unbeliever, the celebration of a person's life on earth is short lived as one contemplates their eternal punishment.

Today is Saints Triumphant Sunday, a day the church has set aside for contemplating how the resurrection of all believers is the victory over death Christ has given to his church. The resurrection touches and concerns the heart of our faith. Through faith in Christ, we are assured without doubt that the resurrection of the dead means eternal life in heavenly bliss. In the reading for today, Jesus assures us that all who die believing in the Lord Jesus are Saints Triumphant for they can no longer die; for God is the God of the living, not the dead!

At the time of Christ, the Roman Empire had conquered Israel and permitted Israel to have a role in its own government. The Sadducees and Pharisees, also known as the teachers of the law, were the two ruling parties of the Jewish nation. Members of both parties wanted have Jesus put to death because they thought he might become Israel's king and replace them out as the religious and political leaders. But since Jesus had a popular following among the people, these religious leaders decided they needed to trap Jesus in some heresy or false teaching to discredit him with the people. When the Pharisees failed to achieve this goal, the Sadducees stepped in to try to do so.

The reading for today recounts one of a series of encounters between some Sadducees and Jesus on the Tuesday of the last week of his earthly life. Just before this reading, while Jesus was teaching in the Temple, some Sadducees tried to discredit Jesus by tricking him into a false religious position by asking him if it was right to pay taxes to Caesar. If Jesus said yes, then he would be portrayed as a traitor to the Jewish nation for the taxes went to the hated Romans, but if he said no, the Roman government would be after him. Jesus asked whose image was on the coin used to pay the tax, and when told it was Caesar's he said, give to Caesar what was Caesar's, his right to collect taxes, and to God what is God's, his right to our worship and praise. Luke tells us, the Sadducees were unable to trap him in what he said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent.

The Sadducees were not willing to give up and tried to trick him with a question about the resurrection of the dead in the reading for today. It is noteworthy that the doctrine of the Sadducees was quite different from the Scriptures. They denied the resurrection of the body after death, denied the continuing existence of the soul after death and in fact taught there was nothing after death at all. This denial was not based on Scripture, but on the basis on their own human reasoning that they would not believe what
they could not see with their own eyes. Thus, they were not trying to really learn anything by this question, but simply to make Jesus look foolish in any answer he might give.

So in the reading for today, they tried to trap Jesus with a seemingly impossible question about the resurrection. Hear how the question was put to our Savior: Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. Teacher, they said, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. The second and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. Finally, the woman died too. Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?

Under the Old Testament levirate law, God had commanded that if a married man died childless but left a surviving brother, that brother was to marry the widow. The first born son of that union would bear the name of the deceased brother. This was commanded by God to prevent family names from dying out in Israel. The Sadducees question was designed around the most unlikely event of seven brothers dying without children and all marrying the first brother's wife. The point was to show there could be no resurrection because if so in heaven the woman would have seven husbands, an unheard of situation in the world. The goal of the Sadducees was to show that since Jesus clearly taught the resurrection, he was a false teacher and not be trusted as the Messiah.

We are told: Jesus replied, The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. When Jesus speaks about taking part in that age, he is referring to heaven. In heaven there will be no marriage for God has decreed that a marriage ends with the death of one of the spouses and in heaven no one will marry.

The more literal translation of the saying they can no longer die would be they’ll not be able to die. The reason why is that they will be like the angels. To be like the angels is to be immortal, to live forevermore. They will live forever for they are taking part in the resurrection of the dead. Who are those considered to be worthy of taking part in the resurrection? It is only those who believe in the resurrection of the dead through faith in Christ as the Savior. Jesus makes us worthy of the resurrection, to be raised to live eternally, by removing our sins and crediting us with the perfect righteousness of Christ.

The sad part of this that the Sadducees fell into the trap that says in all matters of faith it is up to each person to decide what to believe, in spite of what God says in the Scriptures. By giving themselves license to believe whatever they wanted about the resurrection, they robbed themselves of the core of the faith. In rejecting the resurrection, they rejected Christ and their own salvation. As religious leaders they also robbed all who listened to them of the promise of eternal life through faith in Christ.

What does this mean for you? You and I also need to watch that we do not fall into the same trap of letting our human reason dictate what we believe when it goes against Scripture. If we hold onto Scripture, we have the comfort of the resurrection in the face of death. This means though you have sinned and deserve eternal death, through faith in Jesus, you will live forever as a child of God. The comfort for your loved ones is that as they gaze upon your body in a coffin, they will know you will live forever and at the great
resurrection, God will raise your body for eternal life, no longer able to die. We can be sure of this for God is the God of the living, not the dead!

Jesus understands the struggle to believe in the resurrection. He also knew that the Sadducees based their belief only on the Books of Moses, the first five books of the Old Testament, and so rejected the rest of the Old Testament. In his great love and compassion, Jesus used the Book of Moses to prove the resurrection to the Sadducees. He said: But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive. Recall that the account of the bush was the burning bush in which Moses saw the bush burning but not being consumed. In that account, God appeared to Moses and called him to lead the people out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land.

In that account, Moses asked God what his name was and he told him his name was I AM. That name means that God is the constant being who never changes. It means we can trust his promises for he will not change his mind. In the account God told Moses: I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Moses wrote that account and so in the reading Jesus says: But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

The point of course is that by the time Moses saw the burning bush, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had long been dead, but for God to be their God then and there, they had to be alive. They were alive in heaven for God is the God of the living. This is true and will never change for God is the constant great I AM. To God all are alive, even the unbeliever, for the resurrection is also true for the unbeliever, but not to his comfort, but to his eternal shame and punishment. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection because they did not believe even the Scripture found in the Book of Moses! Oh that they would have believed all of Scripture and listened to Job's confession of the resurrection when he said: I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes - I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

Don’t be like the Sadducees who were willing to base their faith only on what they could see and so rejected the resurrection. Rather, base your faith on what God says, then you will know that what is certain in this life is not only death, unless Jesus comes first, and taxes, but especially the resurrection to life eternal. This certainty is so powerful that at every funeral held at this church, the comfort offered and taken was and always will be that all who die believing in the Lord Jesus are Saints Triumphant for they can no longer die; for God is the God of the living, not the dead! Amen.

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