

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Gospel: Luke 20:27-38

Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first married and died childless; then the second and the third married her and so in the same way all seven died childless. Finally the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her."

Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive."

REFLECTION 1:

GOING TO GRANNY'S'

A little girl bounced excitedly up the airport ramp to board a plane. 'Where are you going?' the mother asked. Without missing a bounce, the little girl said, 'To Granny's, to Granny's, to Granny's'. The girl's answer helps us to illustrate Jesus' point about the afterlife. We should think of it, not so much as being a place, as being a person. Remember how Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, 'Tell them (the disciples) that I am returning to my God and your God'. (John 20: 17).

These dark November days (Gerrógaí Dubha na Nollag – the short dark days before Christmas) lend a sympathetic setting while pondering on life's terminus. It's journey's end for Jesus too as his long pilgrimage to Jerusalem draws to a close. A bitter reception awaits him there as the various factions of power, one after another, confront him with hostile questions. This time it was the turn of the Sadducees, a small but wealthy faction in the city who did not accept the teachings about angels and the prospect of life after death. So, they set a trap for Jesus with their unbelievable story of seven brothers who married the one wife, leaving no heirs. Whose wife shall she be in the afterlife? Jesus replied that the law pertaining to marriage would have no relevance for the resurrected since there would be no further need to propagate life. The children of the resurrection are similar to the angels he said, being the sons and daughters of God. The Sadducees represented a minority viewpoint, as most of Jesus' audience accepted the doctrine of life after death. They held firmly to the belief that as the Book of Wisdom, so often quoted at masses of Christian burial says, 'The souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God and no torment shall ever touch them, they are at peace'. (Book of Wisdom 3: 1-6, 9).

Jesus throughout the Gospels presents some homely images of heaven and after life. He describes heaven as being like a great banquet, a wedding feast, and the celebration of a victory and as a reward for fidelity for using one's talents with profit. Jesus also appeals to our family memory, that of reunion with our loved ones and restoring the lost to paradise. John, in his Gospel, speaks of Jesus as inviting us after this present life, into the 'fullness of life'. Eternal life, says Jesus, is to know the Father and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.

To know Jesus Christ is to realise that all is made new, through his death and resurrection (Pascal Mystery). Journey's end means arriving home at the fullness of our calling. Dying he has destroyed our death, rising he has restored our life and we cry out, 'Lord Jesus come in glory'. As Robert Ingersoll in a poem expressed it, 'From the voiceless lips of the silent dead there comes no word. But in the night of death, hope sees a star and listening love can hear the rustle of a wing'. As that little girl so innocently put it, 'We'll be going to Granny's'!

REFLECTION 2: THE SEVEN BROTHERS

A friend of mine told me that he once went to the Abbey Theatre with the Author of a play. But he said he'd never do it again. The Author knew the whole story from beginning to end. He knew every line before it was spoken and every event before it happened on stage. He kept whispering the next line into his ear and told him about every scene before it took place. God is much wiser than that. He knows the story of each one of us from beginning to end, but he doesn't spoil the plot for us. All the excitement and anticipation of the unknown are ours to experience. Life is a mystery - filled with the unexpected and the unpredictable, but that is a large part of its beauty and charm. Most of us are glad that there's a mystery about life and that there are things we must discover for ourselves – happy that there are some things that we simply do not know.

You see, real religion requires honesty. There is no other way to do business with God. He knows everything about us, who we are, what we do, and why we do it. Our Gospel today is about a group of people called Sadducees who came to Jesus with a question about the Resurrection. The funny thing was that they didn't even believe in the resurrection. They were simply trying to embarrass Jesus by asking him a question that they thought he couldn't answer – but Jesus wasn't intimidated, he gave an honest and direct answer. The Sadducees' problem was not a lack of information but a lack of basic honesty. They missed the truth because their minds were closed and sealed. These Sadducees have an important message for us. It is this - be honest - in our approach to life and in our dealings with God. Honesty is primary. Nothing else matters. Christ himself cannot change our lives until we open our hearts to his love and our minds to his truth. So, let's be honest.

In this life, you and I will never have an opportunity of a face to face interview with Jesus of Nazareth – but I'd like to think that we'd have a few questions to ask him if he ever granted us an audience. I think we should be honest enough to ask the right questions. These Sadducees had an interview with Jesus and all they could come up with was a ridiculous question about whose wife the woman would be at the resurrection? What difference did it make whose wife she'd be – who cares anyway? – it has nothing to do with life here and now.

I learned a salutary lesson in a Latin class when I was at College. There were two blackboards in the classroom and the master had written a different set of questions on each board. He left for a while during the test and told us which set of questions was for the next class. A classmate of mine arrived late, missed the explanation, answered every question perfectly but failed the test. He answered the wrong set of questions. It taught us all that it was not enough to know the right answers – we must also ask the right questions. We can have the right answer to a lot of questions and still fail the test of life. Questions like 'where can we make the most money?' Yes, indeed the question is important but it's not the ultimate question. A lot of people have answered it perfectly and yet failed the test of life. We should rather ask the big questions like 'Who am I?', 'Why am I here?', 'Where am I going?' These are the big issues – let's ask them sincerely and honestly and we'll be doing something worthwhile.

And let's be honest enough to practice the truths we already know. This is where most of us have our biggest problem. It isn't that we don't know – it's that we don't practice. This was also the problem with

the Sadducees, their difficulty was not with life after death, it was life before death. They were asking about a woman who had been widowed 7 times and they were only interested in finding out which husband she'd have after death. Even if there was such a woman who had gone through such heartache as to lose 7 husbands – the issue should have been how they could help – how they could ease her burden – how they could show that God still cares – and these are the questions we should try to answer. We could have shown her that God cares by showing that we care.

That's what honest religion is all about. We don't need to know all the answers, but we should try to put into practice the truths we already know. Love the people God loves and in a practical way share our lives with them. That's real honesty.