

Homily for November 11, 2001
32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle C

By Father Charles Bowes

2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14
2 Thessalonians 2:15—3:5
Luke 20:27-38

We are more than immortal. We are, together, a new creation.

We have gotten sidetracked in Western Christianity, I think, when we talk about the Resurrection – the debate in our gospel, Luke chapter 20 – an argument deliberately designed to trap Jesus which he skillfully avoided altogether.

We have gotten hung up on the physical facts of what happened on Easter morning – vitally important though that is – and when it comes to the meaning of the Resurrection we go a bit flat. We talk about our own life after death and the fact that Resurrection guarantees that. Well, again, so it does. That's fine. But the Resurrection means so much more than just what's going to happen to my body and me after I'm dead. I'm quite interested in what happens to me after I'm dead, but I'm not the only pebble on the beach, and the beach is more than the sum total of all the pebbles. The Resurrection says not just that Jesus is alive today, and I can have a personal relationship with him – though that's true; not just that there is a life after death and I can enjoy it when I get there – though that's true too; the Resurrection says that there is a *new world*, a new creation, a new order of being that has come into existence. God has made a way through

death and out the other side and the world as we know it – the world of beautiful sunrises and battered children, the world of Mother Teresas and terrorists' attacks, the world that gives us so much joy and pain in large doses – this world is itself, in and through that process, being put to death and brought through the grave to a new life on the other side.

The whole point about the Resurrection, seen from this angle, is that the risen Jesus is the beginning of God's new world order – the revelation of that new order – “the first fruits of those who slept.” He is the guarantee that love is stronger than death, that the God who made the world and has grieved over its fall into sin and corruption has not left it to stew in its own juice but has entered it, taken its pain and shame and death onto himself, and broken through to a new creation – the other side.

And at every Mass at every Eucharist, we enter into that new creation not just as isolated individuals, but as a group – as a body – as the body of Christ which we both receive and become as we enter this new age every time we gather. It's not just me and Jesus in holy communion – it's so much more – it's all of us becoming that new creation – that's us trying so hard to go through the motions of unity so that we actually become so eventually.

It is so hard to imagine, and even harder to accept, that in the new creation we'll all be one – all the bin Ladens and the Hitlers and the Mother Teresas and the St. Pauls – all our enemies become one swallowed up in God's love. And if we say, "Not me...I'll never reconcile with my enemies," maybe that's what purgatory is for – so we can enter God's creation with God's own love – with God's own heart.

At one of the services after the terrorists' attacks some weeks ago, I used a story which a live and venerable parishioner reminded me of, a story told by the renowned lecturer and concentration camp survivor Corrie ten-Boom. She wrote, "I had just given a talk to a large group when suddenly, there before me and coming toward me, I recognized a man who had been one of the guards at the concentration camp where I had been imprisoned, one of those who had been responsible for all that was vile and hateful and oppressive and death-dealing. As he made his way in the line to meet me I said to myself and to my God, 'there is no way I can touch that man, no way I can forgive that man – no way – do not ask this of me, O God.' And in an instant I had a sense of God speaking and saying, 'No, you cannot forgive him, nor do I ask you to forgive him. But let me forgive him through you.'" And with that inspiration, Corrie ten-Boom found herself able to reach out and take the hand of her enemy in hers.

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