

[2 Macc. 7:1-2, 9-14; Psalm 17; 2 Thess. 2:16-3:5, 16-18; Luke 20:27-38]

Why is there no marriage in Heaven? One husband jokingly said, "So we husbands can finally get a little peace and quiet! Of course in the Gospel example, the woman does survive being married to seven husbands! So, you go, girl!

Another question: What is your understanding of the Resurrection? That's the question that Jesus indirectly poses when He challenges the Sadducees in this Sunday's Gospel reading. As Christians, we believe that someday we will experience a Resurrection like Christ's after we depart from this present earthly "age" or stage of life. All believers who follow Jesus will live as the angels do. This is why Catholic Funeral Masses are Resurrection Masses and use white instead of black as the liturgical color for the priest's vestments.

But do you believe in the Resurrection of Love? Jesus explains the Resurrection in terms of marriage. A marriage is supposed to be a reflection of God's radical love for His people. Marriage is supposed to unite one man and one woman in an enduring love that is the very presence of God. It gives witness to the world that God's faithfulness and commitment to us is real. Married spouses: do you reflect God's love and faithfulness to each other?

So why would Jesus say that marriage is not a part of the Resurrection of the Dead? Why won't today's marriages become perfect and continue forever after both husband and wife have entered Heaven? Because here on earth, love is imperfectly given and imperfectly received. Therefore, it's constantly dying and being resurrected again, every day, to the extent that each spouse repents and forgives. (The same is true of any good and healthy friendship.)

God is Perfect Love. We live as true children of God when we love our brothers and sisters the way God loves them. Marriage does not exist in Heaven because it's an imperfect love: We love our spouses more than we love others. In Heaven, we will love our spouses fully (yes, even our ex-spouses!) and we will love everyone else just as much. And those who have loved us poorly will love us better than the best spouse could love us now. Do we believe this?

Marriage is only an earthly foreshadowing of the divine, faithful, creative love that we will share with everyone in Heaven.

Who has failed to love you enough in this world? Who has caused you pain? How would you feel if that person were to greet you at the entrance of Heaven at the moment of your death? Would you have enough love for that person to get YOU through the door? How is a marriage like God's love? Think of the ways that God loves us, and relate these signs of true love to what you've experienced in good and healthy friendships. This a foretaste of Heaven!

Regarding our First Reading: 200 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, Jewish communities were just beginning to wonder about an afterlife. Until then, life was simply here. You were born, you die, and that's it. Eternity will rest only upon the good or bad reputation or legacy you leave behind. This is one of the reasons why buildings and financial foundations and trusts are named after people: they want to be remembered after they are gone. What legacy are we preparing to leave others?

The Maccabees brothers were part of the "resistance." They were part of several disparate Jewish groups who fought their current gentile enemies who dared to take over the Temple in Jerusalem – the Jewish equivalent of St. Peter's Basilica or the Basilica of St. John Lateran – and placed their own pagan altar over the altar of the Holy of Holies. On this altar, the gentiles sacrificed pork and forced their Jewish prisoners to eat it. Including the Maccabees family.

We hear in our First Reading the mother and brothers' decision to choose death rather than to violate the laws of the One True God. If you have a chance this week, read the full chapter 7 of 2 Maccabees, and savor the eloquent farewell speeches given by each of the seven brothers and their mother. Some of the speeches bring tears to my eyes. About forty years later, the Jews had another revolt, liberated Jerusalem and restored their Temple. Ironically, with the help of their future oppressors, the gentile Romans.

How strong is MY confidence in God, and what would I be willing to sacrifice for my convictions? My security, perhaps; but the safety of my children? The Maccabees story goes as far as humanly imaginable to pose that question.

The Sadducees, unfortunately, moved in as the elite class of the wealthy and the religious and were pushing their agenda over that of Jesus. They wanted to push back their religion, denying the existence and the reality of angels, the reality of an eternal soul, and believed only in the first five books of the Old Testament. They denied the development of Jewish theology and wanted to bring Jesus into the argument. While they asked Jesus a petty and nonsensical question, Jesus, quoting a verse from one the first five books of the Bible, frustrates their trap. Always remember this: whenever the enemies of Jesus try to trip Him up, He always knows what is in their hearts, he gives an answer that defeats them, and they have nothing to say except, "Well said, Teacher!"

In this month of November, when we reflect upon death and judgment, Heaven and Hell, Jesus tells us that the next life will not be a continuation of this present life. If we are faithful in this life, a fuller and forever relationship with God awaits us. Dare I say that we become "BFF's" – Best Friends Forever, in Heaven.

St. Paul in today's Second Reading has to evolve in HIS thinking about things as well. In his FIRST Letter to the Thessalonians, he thinks that the return of Jesus is imminent. He thinks that some of his fellow believers will not die, but will be alive at the time of the Second Coming. But by his SECOND letter, he changes his thinking and encourages the people to continue living their full and active lives, not just sitting around waiting for Jesus.

Like Pope Francis, St. Paul asks the people to pray for him and for his ministry, knowing that things will be getting worse before they get better. Actually, things only get worse for Paul. But God's grace and the prayerful support of Christian believers carry him through, and us as well.

Then he reminds them – and us – what Saint Pope John Paul II said about you good people: "You laypersons who possess faith, have a unique opportunity and a crucial responsibility. In your lives and through your daily activities, you show the power that faith has to transform the world and to renew the human family." In other words, folks, YOU are an unstoppable force for goodness and life in a world where evil and death seem to have the upper hand.

And that is very good news! If it is to be, it is up to me! AMEN!