

## DEACON GEORGE'S HOMILY FOR 32<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

The Sadducees came from the well-to-do class of higher officials, wealthy merchants, landowners and priests. They were very influential in the political and religious life of Judaism. They tolerated the Greek culture prevalent in that part of the Mediterranean world. They were the statesmen and diplomats of that time.

At the time of Jesus, the Sadducees accepted the Roman rule and custom, in exchange for retaining their power and influence. They enjoyed security under Roman patronage, and not surprisingly, supported political co-existence. They opposed any Jewish nationalism, and any activity that would cause them to lose their political base.

They were religiously conservative. They only accepted the written Law of Moses, namely the first five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch. They did not believe in a liberating Messiah, nor did they believe in the resurrection of the dead, or in angels or in spirits. Instead, they believed that everyone, good or bad, died and went to Sheol, and that was the end. This belief enabled them to enjoy this world, without any worry about the afterlife.

Resurrection is a later doctrine found in the books of Daniel, Wisdom and Maccabees, and was accepted by the Pharisees. As this doctrine was not in the Pentateuch, the Sadducees ridiculed resurrection, and therefore, they tried to test Jesus with a marriage question on the laws of Moses.

We can thank the Sadducees for asking this question on marriage. They thought it would make the doctrine of resurrection look ridiculous, a doctrine in which we would come forth again from the grave, in the very same bodies which we now have, with all its needs and instincts. Jesus corrected that erroneous idea. For we shall all rise to a new and eternal life, in a form and an existence very different from that of our present life. Thus, the question of ownership of wives or property will not, and cannot, arise in our new life.

We would all like to know a lot more about what our future state will be like. But if we knew it all, then where would our trust and faith in God come in. Meanwhile, Jesus gave us a brief, but basic, description of what our risen bodies will be.

In his brief answer to the Sadducees, Jesus gives us the essential facts concerning our future status. **First:** he affirms that "*those who are judged worthy*" in this life, will rise to an eternal life. In that life we will become like angels. But we will not **be** angels i.e. pure spirits without bodies, but we will be like them in that our **bodies** will be spiritual. Our bodies will lose all restrictions and limitations imposed on them now as mere material composites. They will no longer be subject to decline and decay as they are now. Therefore, they can never suffer from pain or sickness or weakness of any sort.

**Second:** Jesus clearly affirmed that those risen from the dead are no longer liable to death i.e. die again. Leaving aside the other greater joys of heaven, such as the beatific vision, and the close association with Christ in his risen humanity, the meeting with our blessed Mother, Mary and with all the saints, including our relatives and friends. What a source of happiness and joy it will be for us, to know that we can never die again.

However. There are many Christians, even good, pious Christians who fear death and try to keep the very thought of it far from their minds. And sadly, there are, outside this Church, many who are like the Sadducees, and do not believe in a new life after death.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus confirms the theology of resurrection, the belief in life after death. The story of the rich man and Lazarus clarifies this ... and **note** ... this teaching comes directly from the mouth of God. Jesus tells us, that after three days, he will rise from the dead. And he **did** rise from the dead. His tomb was empty. He appeared to Mary Magdalene, then to Cleopas and his friend on the road to Emmaus, then to the disciples in the upper room, first time without Thomas, second time with Thomas, then by the sea of Tiberias, then to 500 plus witnesses. In all, there are ten different instances of his resurrection, described to us in the New Testament. We can never prove the resurrection of Jesus with mathematical, logical proof. But like any other event which claims to be historically true, we can piece together the evidence and draw our own conclusion.

Jesus said to Martha: "*I am the resurrection. Anyone who believes in me, even though that person dies, will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?*" And my answer to his question is ... Yes. I do.