

TITLE: “Life Is in the Body of Christ”

Modern scientists love to resurrect things. Just this past week, there was a report in the news about the proposed resurrection of the extinct Tasmanian tiger. Apparently scientists have successfully recovered usable RNA from a museum sample of a dead Tasmanian tiger. RNA, the acid present in all living organisms that essentially takes the genetic code from DNA and causes the production of organic material like proteins. Now there are hopes that other species like the Woolly Mammoth can be raised from the dead as well.

To raise a dead body is not a medical impossibility. To make the heart beat and the blood flow, to bring an extinct animal back into the world, is an amazing thought. But, to give life to a person, who is more than just a body, to retrieve the human soul from the realm of the dead, to bring back the memories and loves and knowledge of eternal things stored in the mind, this is something beyond the power of medicine. In the story of Elisha and the Shunammite woman, Elisha showed compassion on the woman because she had no children. She was a devout servant of God in an age of complete corruption and wickedness. The rich and powerful in the land of Israel had corrupted the Temple and the worship of the true God, and they were persecuting the prophets and killing them, promoting a culture of death as if it were the way of life. But, the Shunammite woman knew that Elisha was a man of God. She wanted to keep him near, so she made a room for him in her house where

he could stay and rest, furnishing it with instruments fit for God's temple. It even had a table and a menorah. When Elisha promised that she, like Sarah the aged wife of Abraham, would give birth to a son, that promise was fulfilled, and the child that she bore was a sign of God's life-giving promises, not only to her, but to all of Israel. But, when the child was older he fell ill. He came in from the field with his father and complained that his head was hurting. He sat on his mother's lap until noon, when he died in her arms.

Surprisingly, the mother seemed to handle all of this without a word of sorrow or complaint. She placed the body of her son on Elisha's bed in the room that she had made for him, and she said to her husband "All is well." She saddled her donkey and traveled miles and miles to find Elisha, and when she met him, she caught hold of his feet and refused to let go, and said "Did I ask my lord for a son? Did I not say, do not deceive me?" Indeed, she had not asked for a son, but Elisha had promised her one in return for her kindness to him. So Elisha rushed back to her house. He fell upon the boy, so that his eyes were on the boy's eyes and his mouth upon the boy's mouth, his breath breathed out upon the boy like God breathing the breath of life into Adam. And as Elisha stretched himself out upon him two different times, the boy came back to life, sneezed seven times (likely to indicate a complete recreation) and Elisha delivered him to his mother.

It goes without saying that all of us here will one day face death. The good news is that Christ, our God, has taken on our humanity, our mortal body, that we might share in the life of his resurrected body. In our lesson from St. Luke's Gospel, we heard, "Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. 12 And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. 13 When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep'". Since ancient times, the city has been used as a metaphor for the human soul. In the city is the "soul writ large" according to Plato. The miraculous birth and resurrection of the Shunammite's son indicated a new birth of God's people, so in our Gospel lesson, the dead man being carried out from within the city is a depiction of an untimely birth, the fruit of a womb that produces only death, in particular what the Scriptures call "dead works."

We recall Christ's words, when he said, "those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. 19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." Despite the dead birth, so to speak, Christ tells the widow "Do not weep". Later he will tell the women of Jerusalem who follow him along the *via Dolorosa* to Calvary, "Weep not for me, but for yourselves and for your children." As he says elsewhere,

“Wisdom is justified by her children.” Again we have the metaphor of child-birth used to depict the bringing-to-light of that which was hidden in the inner man. St. James uses this same language to describe the ‘conception’ of sin within the heart. He says, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”

We tend to think that death is something medical. Death is a plague of the body, a slow disease that eats away at the life of its victim from the inside out. But, from the very beginning, Holy Scripture has been telling us something different, and indeed, it shows us that we get things exactly backwards. When God warned Adam and Eve not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil “for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die”, he wasn’t talking about the death of the body only. We know the story. Eve took the fruit and gave it to Adam, they ate of it, and immediately a host of angels descended from heaven blaring trumpets, as fire shot up from beneath the earth, exploding in a great cataclysm that rent the crust of the earth into pieces, and our first parents were vaporized as the whole creation was sucked into a cosmic vortex and ceased to exist. No, but what actually happened was worse than that. The living breathing, immortal image of the living God on earth, the heart of man was torn, ripped from the loving embrace of its Father, and cast

headlong into the hopeless void of a life without a god in the world, which the Scriptures call “death”.

St. Paul tells us that it was God’s commandment to Adam and Eve that became the occasion of sin and death within them. He says, “I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.” 8 But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. 9 I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. 10 And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. 11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.”

Is God’s commandment evil then, if it caused sin to enter into the world? Paul asks the question himself, “Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.” In other words, the purpose of God’s law is to expose the evil intents of the heart by outlining what is perfect and good. It is a good thing to have our hearts exposed and the evil within fully acknowledged, not hidden under a mountain of excuses, like the one Adam invented when God found him hiding in the bushes: “it wasn’t me, it was that woman that you gave me – yes, the one I called ‘bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh’ earlier today – she deceived me. It was her fault.”

Our sin is always someone else's fault. The deeper you go within the prison of the sinful soul, the louder the prisoners protest their own innocence. No one is ever guilty there. All have been wrongly accused. And, yet protest all you want, you will never be set free until you admit the truth, not comparing your sins to the sins of others, but owning the consequences for yourself, by looking into the perfect, sinless face of Christ who loved you while you were yet a sinner, and saying, "It is true, Lord. There is nothing within me that is worthy of your love. O Christ, I would make a room for you within my heart, if only you would come and stay like Elisha, for a time, if only you would draw near, be born within me as you were the Blessed Virgin Mary, that I too might have the courage to say, "Let it be unto me, according to thy word." But, how can I make room for you, thou Son of God? O Lord, even if I made a room, I am not worthy that thou should come under my roof. I've tried to love as you love, but people are hard to love. I've tried to forgive as you forgive, but I have failed again and again. And there are those, O Lord, who when I did love them purely, accused me of trying to take advantage of them. I feel like I have nothing in this world to be proud of. I'm either fighting myself or fighting with others. When will there be peace, O Lord?" Will there at least be peace in death?

As John Henry Newman prayed, this prayer that we find in our Prayer Books, "O Lord, support us all the day long of this troublous life, until the shades lengthen and the evening comes, the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over and our

work is done; then Lord, in thy mercy, grant us safe lodging, a holy rest, and peace at the last, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” O Lord, grant us peace at the last. “Weep not” Christ said to the widow. St. Paul said, “I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” You see, it was not the death of the body only that came as a result of Adam’s sin. It was a much more tragic death. It was banishment to perpetual cosmic loneliness, to wander as a soulless shadow through a world without hope, where the gods are all idols made by men to feed their craving for ambition, to fuel their lust for domination instigating constant wars to support their own ethnic and cultural narratives of mighty men triumphing over other mighty men *ad infinitum*.

But, “thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” There is a light sprung up for the righteous. There is a prophet in Israel, a man of God. He has poured out the Holy Spirit of God into our hearts, filling up that dark prison where no light can penetrate, where no truth can be told as long as we refuse to admit our own fault, as long as we cling to the idol of self-defense. In Christ a light springs up from within, as long as we weep, not for him, but for ourselves and for the children, the products, the dead fruit that our hands have produced. And – Thanks be to God! – to those who weep over their sin, Christ says, as he said to the widow, “Weep not.” As

Solomon serenades his bride, Christ says, “Rise up, my love, my fair one, And come away. 11 For lo, the winter is past, The rain is over and gone. 12 The flowers appear on the earth; The time of singing has come, And the voice of the turtledove Is heard in our land. 13 The fig tree puts forth her green figs, And the vines with the tender grapes Give a good smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, And come away!” For behold, “Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: The snare is broken, and we are free.”

“And he came and touched the bier; and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all, and they glorified God, saying, That a great Prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people. And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judaea, and throughout all the region round about.” “Rise up, my love, my fair one, And come away. For lo, the winter is past, The rain is over and gone.” The rain is dried up, and so shall the tears be. Weep not. Christ has freed you from “the body of sin.” The “body of sin” does not mean that the body is the cause of our sin, just as the law of God is holy, righteous, and good. Rather, it is the disorder of the soul that is easily dragged down by the lusts of the flesh and the fears of this mortal life. What we need is not a life without a body, but a soul wedded to a body that will not draw us down,



but will render us lighter than air, that our whole lives might hang upon every word that comes from the mouth of our Beloved Savior.

And now you see, beloved, how it is that our souls can live, even though our present bodies die. Our souls live because they are united to the very real and present body of our Beloved, Jesus Christ. A soul is naturally united to a body. It is not normal for either to exist alone. In our epistle lesson, when Paul says “that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith”, he doesn’t mean that Christ only dwells in us because the love of Christ gives us good vibes and warm feelings. He means that Jesus Christ, body, soul, and divinity, in a literal but spiritual way dwell in us, so that we are now bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. Paul says, that if Christ dwells in your heart then you “know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” To be filled with all the fulness of God? That’s something more than just good vibes and warm feelings.

This is why we cannot say that Holy Communion is only a memorial, purely a symbolic collective retelling of a past event, with the purpose of strengthening our resolve by reminding us of what we already know. Rather, we must affirm that in Holy Communion we partake of the real, substantial and incorruptible body of Jesus Christ. As he said to his disciples, “my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed...If you do not eat of my flesh and drink my blood, there is no life in you.” Why? Well, it should be obvious by now. Our bodies are dead because the light of

our souls has gone out. And our souls, having gone out, have brought death to our bodies. Only Christ can free us from our bodies of death, by giving us the bread which Scripture says “is a participation in his body” and the cup which “is a participation in his blood.” His immortal and divine body and blood become ours in Holy Communion, so that we can be filled with all the fullness of God. So, I encourage you, as the Church always has, to spend this week preparing your souls and bodies to receive the body of Christ in Holy Communion, if not on Friday at the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels, then next Sunday.

Spend some time in holy spiritual preparation, as a bride preparing to receive her Bridegroom, praying earnestly that in that Holy meal, “our sinful bodies might be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood.” Let us come seeking a new body, no that does not drag us downward, one without fear of death, one that lifts us up to heaven by its passion and love for Jesus Christ our Lord. Let us pray, “O LORD, we beseech thee, let thy continual pity cleanse and defend thy Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour, preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”