



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year C-November 10<sup>th</sup> 2019

***Readings: 2 Maccabees 7: 1-2. 9-14, Psalm 16, Thessalonians 2: 16-3. 5,  
Luke 21: 26***

Even casual readers of the Gospel accounts will be familiar with the, almost monotonous, regularity with which Jesus castigates the Pharisees. That they were serious about their faith there is no doubt. Saul of Tarsus was, after all, a Pharisee. But there was something about their puritanical self-righteousness and judgemental demeanour that seemed to get right up the divine nostrils.

In contrast today we encounter a brief run-in with the other key religious group, the Sadducees. They were at the other end of the scale. The chief tenet of their religious commitment was a belief in their superiority and aristocracy. They eschewed any belief of a spiritual nature, no angels, no soul, no afterlife. They were the Court party, wedded to a literal belief in Torah and their own inalienable self-importance. Their hope was for this life alone. They are, par excellence, the establishment party – devoid of any conviction other than their own preferment. Largely a ‘content-free’ cult they infrequently seem to deserve the attention of Jesus.

Today is an exception. The Sadducees decide to have a bit of fun with Jesus and the ‘ridiculous’ idea of an afterlife and resurrection. Thus they set Him a puzzle.

There was a much-widowed, childless woman who, by law and tradition was handed down from one dead brother to the next seven times.....

In the Resurrection Anastasis (pause for much sniggering) whose wife will she be? Because they all 'had her'.

The adolescent humour is concealed in English but the Greek reveals the smutty interplay of ideas. Resurrection – literally 'standing up'.

'Had her' – taking possession of.

There is no disguising their implied contempt for Jesus or the vulgarity of their line of questioning.

Jesus plays a very straight bat here. He ignores their puerile innuendo. He goes straight to the issue.

Marriage and giving in marriage become redundant. This will come as a relief to some and disappointment to others, but the Risen life is no longer limited by time or tied to procreation. The love of one another is not lost but transformed and relationships transcended in the presence of the eternal. Those who enter the new age of the Risen Life become like angels. Our primary relationship is with God. All other relationships – and they are not lost – are in that context.

Jesus firmly and courteously tells the cultural cynics the authoritative truth about our future. It is real. It is personal. It is with God and it is not trammelled by the limitations and failings and transitory considerations of the flesh.

Then, suddenly, and using a powerful image from Scripture, that is not short of a frisson of innuendo, Jesus undoes the Sadducees own argument by appealing to the only authority that they claim to accept – the Torah.

Remember, Jesus says, the supreme moment of initial and intimate revelation in the Torah. Moses is summoned to the miraculous 'bush of fire'. From her the Word of God proceeds. She is ablaze with the Presence and the love of God – but not consumed. It is no accident that, for ikon writers of later ages, the bush is taken to be an image or allegory of Our Lady.

In that revelatory exchange between God and Moses, the nature of God reveals Himself and His identity. 'Who are you?' asks Moses. The answer will echo down the centuries of Faith. 'I AM' – the eternal one, the ground of being.

And He identifies His relationship with the Patriarchs.

He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

This is both historical and current. Thus they are not dead but alive.

He is not God of the Dead but of the living.

Today, at memorials all over the country, just as here, wreaths will be laid in remembrance of the war dead. It would be difficult, at first sight, to think of anything further removed from the loaded, smutty, sniggering conversation initiated by the Sadducees in today's Gospel. Jesus' response pitches it right at the heart of what we do.

Those who reject the revelation of the spiritual, the life of the soul and the Resurrection are simply conducting an exercise in establishment sentimentality. The faithful, those here at Mass and other believers at worship and at the memorials, are acknowledging – a living communion with the dead. We can claim the true meaning of 'remembrance' – that is not simply a matter of memory but relationship, not simply a matter of the past but of the here and now and of the future for this is truly of God and the mystery of this Remembrance is the heart of the Mass.

We might also note and learn from Jesus example of how to turn a sneering, loaded, smutty, disbelieving question into a moment of catechesis and missionary challenge as people are forced to wake up to the reality of their position. Remembrance is a good place to begin that conversation because everyone has an interest in what comes after this.