

32nd Sunday C (Luke 20:27-38)

Some of you may be old enough to remember that often-repeated wartime saying of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, "So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." I think he may have been reading the Gospels and listening to Jesus, who repeated over and over again in the Gospels, "Fear not," "Why are you afraid?" "Perfect love casts out fear."

Fear is a terrible thing. It freezes us, making us immobile, like a deer in front of headlights. Because we are afraid, we sometimes fail to make choices that are life-giving, choices that lead us into the unknown where God may be calling us into the fullness of life. Consequently, we may live enslaved by fear and fail to live our life fully. Fear often has to do with fear of loss, usually the loss of something or someone dear to us, something familiar and what makes us feel secure and protected. It may be the fear of the loss of a job, or our financial security, or with the loss of a friend, or the loss of a marriage through death or divorce. One of the big fears that is common to all of us is likely the fear of death. We have no experience of what lies ahead and that fear of the unknown may paralyze us.

The Sadducees in today's Gospel try to trap Jesus. They were a group who didn't believe in life after death, so they proposed an absurd dilemma about seven brothers who died, and the successive marriage of each one to the widow. Sarcastically they asked Jesus whose wife she will be in the resurrection of the dead. Jesus ignores their dilemma and speaks several truths about life after death.

Life after death won't be the same as life on earth; it will be different, a transformed life where marriage won't have a place. He gives us a glimpse of that life in his resurrection, living in a transformed, glorified body. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, the one who promises us new life in the Lord Jesus.

Living with the faith and assurance that we will be with God after we die will free us from some of our fear. We will be able to go about our lives, enjoying the beauty of creation and relationships with our family and friends. We have the promise of Jesus that life has already begun and will reach fulfillment after our death. We can live as children of God who will one day be with God forever. That hope will affect our choices and our actions.

As we gather today to celebrate God's goodness to us, we remember that Jesus died and was raised to life. He destroyed death and promised that it would no longer have a hold on us. We too will be raised after our death as he promised. We have every reason to live in hope, not allowing fear to paralyze us. The perfect love that comes to us in Jesus casts out all fear. And for this freedom, we give thanks.

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