

RANDALL B. SMITH

Will There Be Sex in Heaven?

The notion that after death there is a resurrection of the body has been a “stumbling block” and “folly” to various people throughout history (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23-24). We find a notable example in a story repeated in the three Synoptic Gospels about a challenge posed to Jesus by the Sadducees, who, as a group, did not believe in the resurrection (cf. Mt. 22:23-34; Mk. 12:18-27; Lk. 20:27-40). The conundrum they pose to Him involves a woman who has had seven husbands, each of whom died. After the wife dies, at the resurrection, if they all rise from the dead, whose wife will she be?

The Sadducees are not asking this question because they really want to know; they’re trying to trap Jesus. My students have asked me a similar question over the years, though what they usually have on their minds is the question of sex. Will the husband or husbands who died first feel that the wife has been unfaithful? In Heaven, do they all, well — and here my students often demur, until they finally can find no other way to say this — *share* her? It is touch-

ing to think that, even in our supposedly “sexually liberated” society, this prospect still troubles them.

Jesus’ reply to the Sadducees is enigmatic, as was His custom with all those whose questions were puzzles-to-trap rather than means-to-truth. “As for the dead being raised,” He tells His inquisitors, “have you not read what was said to you by God, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.” When the crowd heard it, Matthew tells us, “they were astonished at his teaching” (Mt. 22:31-33).

Consider the power of Jesus’ reply; it might not be immediately apparent to us now. Throughout the Old Testament, we find repeated references to “the God of our fathers,” the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” The very land in which the Jewish people resided was described by God Himself as “the land which I have sworn to your fathers” (Judg. 2:1), “the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (Exod. 6:8). If the Sadducees admitted that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were no longer in existence, then would not those promises have died with the men to whom they were made? Or if the Sadducees had claimed, in Platonic fashion, that the bodies of their fathers had been left behind, while it was only their spirits that remain alive in God, then why would the physical land be such an important part of the promise? If the material body is unimportant, then certainly physical land could be no more important.

Christ tells the Sadducees, “You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God” (Mt. 22:29). Is God not *able* to raise to

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Himself the bodies He Himself created? Does God's power not extend to bodies as well as spirits? Or is the problem in our inability to conceive of a kind of bodily existence unlike our own, one that transcends the limitations of time and space, as Christ's risen body did? If we believe Christ is risen, and that He is risen *body and soul* — which we profess to believe in the creeds — and if we are risen “in Christ,” then shall we not say that we, too, can be risen body and soul? Or do we doubt that Jesus' human body has risen and remains eternally with God? And do we then doubt that Christ can be present, *bodily*, in the Eucharist, across time and around the world? And might we then wonder whether the problem isn't that, at bottom, we just can't accept the idea that the all-powerful creator God, the great immaterial Source of All Being, took on flesh and became an actual human being who got hungry and tired, who ate, slept, felt pain, and died? Understood in this context, the Sadducees' question hits at the heart of the Christian faith. It isn't merely about *sex*; it's about a God who can enter into human affairs (for example, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), who can, ultimately, become incarnate as an actual human person with an actual human body, and who can raise that body up after death.

Although the Sadducees might imagine they are tricking Christ into showing that He is “un-orthodox,” not a “doctrinally correct” Jew, instead Christ has, as was His custom, reflected their question back on them, as if to say, “What do you *really* believe about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Do you believe in the power of God? Or is your faith ultimately in your own power and your ability to manipulate the Scriptures to confound your opponents?”

Let's say that, unlike the Sadducees, we are not questioning God's power or the reliability of the Scriptures but are beginning with faith in the resurrection of the body. Then we would not be trying to *disprove* something; rather, we would be trying to understand something we believe God can do and that the Scriptures tell us He does do. We start by *believing* that God can reconcile in the general resurrection the problem of the seven husbands and one wife, and then we ask how we might begin to understand this claim.



Let's begin with Jesus' response to the Sadducees. Matthew tells us that Jesus says, “In the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (22:30). Mark's account is identical. Luke's account is nearly identical, but his report of Jesus' words is a bit fuller. He has Jesus telling the Sadducees, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are accounted worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die any more, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection” (20:34-36). The sense is the same in all three Gospels, but Luke's addition may help us fill out something that's implicit in the other two but left unsaid.

In Luke's account, we see that “those who are accounted worthy” to attain to the resurrection of the dead are not only “equal to angels” (*isaggeloi*) — not much different from Matthew and Mark's “like angels” (*hōs aggeloi*) — but are “sons of God” and “sons of the resurrection.” Why is this significant?

Luke, a onetime companion of St. Paul, is expressing two Pauline themes: first, that it is “in Christ” that all shall be made alive, and second, that “in Christ” we receive “adoption” as “sons of God.” For example, Paul writes:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom. 8:18-23)

A little later in the same chapter, Paul writes, “Those whom he [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many

brethren” (8:29). Finally, he says:

When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir. (Gal. 4:5-7)

By “heir,” Paul means an heir to the kingdom of God.

When Luke says that in the resurrection those who are worthy become “sons of God” and “sons of the resurrection,” he is echoing Paul’s teaching that Christ is the “first-born among many brethren,” that in the resurrection of the Son of God, Christ is the “first fruits” of what is promised for God’s “adopted sons,” who will become, as it were, “sons of the resurrection.”

If we want an answer to the question the Sadducees pose, we — who have the benefit of living after Christ’s death and resurrection, which the Sadducees did not — can look to Christ’s resurrected body for a clue to help us answer the question. If we do that, what do we learn?

The risen Christ, though clearly a *body* — the disciples touch Him and eat with Him — is not bound by time and space the way we are in the present life. He can appear and disappear in the Upper Room even though the doors and windows are locked. After He physically breaks bread with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, He vanishes from their sight. One answer to the Sadducees’ question is to point out that, like Christ, our resurrected bodies will not be bound by the same limitations of time and space as our bodies are in this life.

Let’s look at another passage from St. Paul that contains what many scholars consider to be one of the earliest Christian creeds:

I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at

one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Cor. 15:3-8)

In the verses that follow, we find a series of eloquent defenses of the doctrine of the resurrection. It is in this section that we find the passages in which Paul argues that “if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Cor. 15:12-14). “But in fact,” writes Paul, “Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20).

Then Paul states outright the question he thinks many people are asking, a question similar to the one the Sadducees asked Jesus: “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” Here is Paul’s reply:

What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is alike, but there is one kind for men, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are celestial bodies and there are terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.... So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. (1 Cor. 15:36-44)

Notice that Paul does not say that what dies is bodily, and what is raised is spiritual. He says explicitly that there is a “spiritual body” (*sōma pneumatikon*).

What would a “spiritual body” be like? It is hard to know. The best answer we can give is that it would be like Christ’s risen body. And one of the

chief characteristics of Christ's risen body is that Christ has been giving Himself to mankind in the Eucharist at times and places so numerous that they can be known only to Him. If Christ is one, and yet He can give Himself in this way to many, then our participation in His resurrection is likely similar. We can be united with many across time and space in ways our present bodies do not allow.

Notice as well that implied in Paul's image is the idea that there must be death before there is life: The seed must be planted in the ground and die so that the plant can spring up and live. And when that single seed sprouts and grows, it can bear much fruit. It can feed many people.

Let's return now to the first part of Christ's reply to the Sadducees, in which He tells them that in the resurrection, men and women "neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die any more" (Lk. 20:35-36). What might this mean? Let's think about marriage. In marriage, a man "leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). In the marriage ceremony, we sometimes see the father of the bride give his daughter to her future husband to indicate symbolically that she is leav-

ing one household to begin one of her own with her husband. In a Catholic ceremony, the spouses pledge to be open to children and to raise them faithfully up to God. In cultures in which women and children are less valued and more frequently in danger, there is a sense that the father is "handing over" his daughter and whatever children she and her husband may have into the husband's protection. The two chief ends of marriage, the Catholic Church has always taught, are the union of the spouses and the procreation of children.

Now consider the situation of the sons and daughters of the resurrection. There would be no more such "giving" in marriage to protect daughters because there would be no risk of death. And so, too, there would be no need for procreation. What remains, however, is the sacramental union of the spouses "in Christ." This union would still be "bodily" in the same way Christ is bodily present to the disciples in the Upper Room or on the road to Emmaus.

If this is so, then marriage could be intimate without necessarily being sexual in the limited way we experience the act. If by "sexual" we mean acts directed at producing offspring, then no. If by "sexual" we mean acts that involve intimate connections between bodies, then yes. The distinction is impor-

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tant even in this life. Plenty of women complain that they want their husbands to be more “intimate” and “romantic” without always assuming that this sort of bodily intimacy will result in sexual intercourse — especially if that sexual intercourse entails little or no interest in the romantic union of the spouses and a definite antipathy toward the production of new life.

What we must remind ourselves in this regard is simply this: *As God is the Source of All Good, whatever is good about the sexual act could not be missing in Heaven.* I will ignore for the present any argument suggesting that there will not be marriage in Heaven because marriage is not “good.” The Church’s teaching simply does not allow this view. So too, if we must say that nothing truly good can be missing from God, the Source of All Good, then if marriage is good — and it clearly is — then it must exist somehow in God. But for the moment, we’re focusing on what we in our society seem to be most concerned about, namely, sex. With regard to sex, I think we can say this:

Anything in the sexual act that is the result of selfishness or the desire to instrumentalize another for one’s own pleasure would be stripped away. Hence, if *that* is what my students are implying when they ask, “Will there be sex in Heaven?” — if, for example, they have derived their understanding of “sex” from watching pornography — the answer would be “No, there won’t be *that* in Heaven.” But, we should immediately add, “There will be a greater intimacy than you can even imagine.”

Okay, so there may be greater intimacy, but what about the seven husbands? Will there be intimacy with all seven? Part of our trouble imagining this may have to do with our inability to imagine different kinds of unity, especially in an age that has so thoroughly associated spousal intimacy with the act of sexual intercourse. Perhaps what we need, therefore, are not merely arguments but images.

Consider for a moment how we might see things differently if we think of marriage as a sacramental foretaste of the heavenly marriage banquet. That is to say, in marriage we are given a foretaste of that more perfect union we will experience with God in Heaven. To what could we compare this?

Let’s imagine that you were separated from your spouse, but you regularly received poetry,

paintings, and letters from your beloved. In this case, you would likely receive these gifts as *expressions* of the love of your spouse. If you then, at a later time, were able to reunite with your spouse, would you immediately dispose of those letters, paintings, and poetry? No, for each is an expression of the love you share. Indeed, you might take them out and read them together, or gather all the paintings to enjoy how your love is depicted differently in each one: in the dark and stormy ones, the bright and cheery ones, or the ones filled with trees and meadows and children. Each would remain unique and wonderful in its own way as an expression of your love.

It would seem a silly question were someone to ask, “Which picture or poem do you love best?” Asking the question this way shows that the person doesn’t understand art — or love. You might simply say in reply, “You are greatly misled.” The people who ask the question this way would show that they think of love and art as kinds of *property*, when they’re not. Love and art should primarily be thought of in terms of *communion*. If God gives a woman seven husbands, these are like seven beautiful paintings given as gifts from God. Can she share all of them together in union with God? Can she share all of them without asking which one she loves more? Does it not at least seem imaginable that she can?

And yet, pictures, poetry, and letters are static entities; human beings are not. Can we imagine a union of *persons* in which the question of which person is loved more seems equally empty and foolish? Isn’t this often the case with children? Each child is unique. Some are dark and stormy; some are bright and cheery; some produce multiple children of their own. People who ask parents which *child* they love best are also, we might say, “greatly misled.” To ask the question this way is to misunderstand the nature of love. You might be able to depend on one child to shop for groceries more than the others; you might find one child more gifted artistically or intellectually than the others; you might even prefer the company of one child to another. But *love*? A parent can love them all as the unique individuals they are. This, too, is a foretaste of the Communion of Saints who together rejoice in God’s loving presence.

Thus, to ask the question about the seven husbands and the one wife the way the Sadducees

asked it, or the way we ask it if we are wondering solely about who is going to have sex with the wife, is to misunderstand the power of God, the witness of Scripture, the character of the resurrected body, and the expansive power of unselfish love. Christ's answer does not indulge the misunderstandings that underlie the question but points us back to what is fundamental. We are not property; we are persons.

And as persons, we belong ultimately to God. But in union with the resurrected Christ, we can also be united fully with others. This is the promise of the Communion of Saints. It is the promise of being united with a love that knows no bounds. In the heavenly marriage banquet, we do not share less in marital intimacy; rather, marital intimacy is perfected by being united with its very Source. ■

OUT WITH THE OLD?

Paul Malocha

LITURGICAL UNITY & THE CRISIS OF INCONGRUITY

With the promulgation of *Traditionis Custodes*, Pope Francis has sidelined the Traditional Latin Mass (TLM). It is now celebrated only at the pleasure of individual bishops, and its use carries restrictions. To some, this seems necessary for the sake of unity in the Church. Despite its relatively small number of adherents, the TLM, some believe, attracts Catholics who are most likely to disobey the current Pope and question the validity of the Second Vatican Council. But Church unity, properly understood, requires acceptance of both the TLM and Vatican II, including the *Novus Ordo* Mass (*NO*), which was inspired by the Council and promulgated by Pope St. Paul VI in its wake. The separation between the old and new liturgies has much to do with poorly conceived and implemented liturgical reform following the Council.

In his *motu proprio*, Francis not only has curtailed use of the TLM, he also has declared that the *NO* is the one liturgical expression of the Catholic faith. Francis's main concern is that wider use of the TLM, made possible by his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, has exacerbated division in the Church in ways that reach beyond the liturgy. Indeed, Francis's goal in promulgating *Traditionis Custodes* was

to defend the Second Vatican Council generally. He sees the TLM as a symbol of resistance to the Council. Latin Mass adherents do not simply object to liturgical abuses in the *NO*; they are often anti-Vatican II holdouts. They question the legitimacy of the entire Council, and the wider availability of the TLM as a result of Benedict's 2007 *motu proprio* emboldened them to think that the old Mass eventually would be re-established as the normative Catholic Mass, and the *NO* left aside as a relatively short-lived (in ecclesial time) and ill-advised experiment. The remedy, in Francis's view, is to restrict the TLM and try to prevent its growth. The old observance needs to be marginalized until it finally disappears and only the *NO* remains.

Prior to the pontificate of Francis, Benedict XVI, with *Summorum Pontificum*, opened the TLM to common use. It was Benedict's response to the persistent petitions of many faithful who loved the old liturgy and wanted it to be more readily available. In his *motu proprio*, Benedict made a

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