

Do you think that All Saints Day and Easter have anything in common? (*Responses*)  
I think that both days provide us with an opportunity to think through what we believe happens in death, resurrection, and eternal life. Obviously at Easter our thoughts are focused on Jesus’ death, resurrection, and eternal life. But on All Saints we think about the people we have named who have died during the past year. How do we understand their deaths AND resurrection from death? What is eternal life? What do we believe?  
. . . I think we have a lot of questions and limited knowledge. So let us consult with Jesus.

In our reading from the Gospel of Luke some Sadducees who believed that the Torah – what we would name as the first five books of the Old Testament – did not present belief in God’s resurrection of the dead, so they did not believe in it. Instead, the Sadducees believed that eternal life only came through one’s offspring who would carry on the family name from generation to generation. That’s why they referred to a law found in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 regarding brothers and widows without children. Of course they presented a rather exaggerated hypothetical situation in regard to this law when they asked Jesus the question, “After being married to all seven brothers, in the resurrection therefore, whose wife will the woman be?” They asked Jesus this NOT because they were seeking clarification or more knowledge about the law, but because they wanted to trip Jesus up and show him that his belief in resurrection was wrong.

But what do we really hear in the Sadducees question? While it is neither a law here in Wisconsin, nor our belief that it is the duty of a brother to marry the childless widow of his dead brother to procreate an heir for his dead brother – we might wonder what will happen “when we all get to heaven” and all the former and more recent spouses are there. Is that going to be an awkward situation? Or is it just part of the weirdness of seeing people from throughout your whole life now all together? Will someone ask you why you dropped them off your Christmas card list – or no longer returned their call? If you had a string of girlfriends or boyfriends, or were seeing more than one person at the same time – is all of that history going to catch up with you in heaven? And exactly HOW will we recognize or “know” who someone is? For example, can I recognize my grandmother the way I remember her? But then how would HER grandmother recognize her as her granddaughter? Are there individual characteristics or particularities, or special relationship connections, that will still be in existence in eternal life? Will we be able to form new relationships in eternal life that we never had, or simply couldn’t, during our human life? Those Sadducees aren’t the only ones with hypothetical questions that could be tricky!

But I think Jesus’ answer still covers a lot of our questions. He said,

*“Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection*

*from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection.”*

*Luke 20:34b-36 NRSV*

Jesus said there is a difference between this human place and age that we are in, and the place and age of resurrection. This implies that we aren't just raised from the dead to pick up right where we left off with our human lives. (Of course I feel compelled to point out that Jesus said this *before* he experienced resurrection from the dead. And Jesus seemed to be able to pick right up and carry on his relationships with his disciples during the forty days after his resurrection. So I'm not sure if Jesus received a special grace period of connection with his disciples before his ascension; or if that happened just because Jesus is Jesus, and we can't expect that to happen to us because we are not Jesus.)

That being said, Jesus made a striking point when he said that marriage as people knew it then would not exist after resurrection. Why was this so striking? Because at the time Jesus was speaking marriage was *not* an equal partnership between two people. It was instead an acquisition of property: a man would 'acquire' a wife. And a woman was considered the 'property' of her husband. So when the husband died, his widow could become the property of his male heir. But Jesus said that after we die – no one will be anyone else's 'property' anymore. No one will 'own' or 'be' property because there's no need for property in the age to come. As the beloved children of God, children of the resurrection, and are like angels, we will all simply share in life with God. And everyone – no matter if they were male or female, slave or free, rich or poor, young or old in their human life – EVERYONE will be without those status differences as children of the resurrection because everyone will equally share in the fullness of resurrection life that God provides. Everyone. ALL the children of the resurrection.

And to conclude his response to the Sadducees, Jesus said:

*“And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.”*

*Luke 20:37-38 NRSV*

Everyone who is a child of the resurrection will be LIVING and cannot die anymore. And God is God of the LIVING, not of the dead. So God is God of the *eternally living* children of the resurrection. Think how many children that would be. It would seem that God is an extreme extrovert who doesn't believe you can get too much of good thing, so God made a way for ALL these children of the resurrection to live with God eternally. There will never be an empty nest for God. The children of God will never leave home. And God will always have room for more children. . . . Perhaps that leaves us with more questions, but we could have plenty of time to live into the answers.

Amen.