

I'm participating in an 8-week study at the Jesuit Retreat House called **Meeting Christ in Prayer**. The participants include people from a variety of different Christian faiths. I would guess about 2/3 of the people participating are Catholic. Because of the variety of people, the leader asked us to refrain from debating issues of theology or doctrine.

Recently during a small group breakout there, someone mentioned angels and guardian angels as part of their prayer experience. I joined in the conversation and voiced my appreciation for God providing us with a guardian angel and that it's scriptural too! Someone quickly responded: "*Is that in the apocrypha?*" ... Oops! I almost violated one of this study group's ground rules.

The apocrypha are seven books in the Old Testament in our Bible that Protestants, for a variety of reasons, do not include as part of their Scriptures. I replied, "*I think guardian angels are mentioned in both of our bibles, but I'll follow up on that next week.*" Part of my response is in today's bulletin.

There **were** differences in what people believed as divinely inspired Scripture 2,000 years ago, and different beliefs exist still today.

In Scripture we hear about several "**ees**." We often hear of the Pharise**es**; and today we hear about the Sadduce**es** and the Maccab**ees**. Two of these three groups believe in the resurrection of the body, and one does not.

Here is a corny way to remember which one of these Jewish groups does not believe in the resurrection. The Sadducees are **sad you see** ... because they do not believe in the resurrection of the body.

The **Sadducees** were very **literal** in their interpretation of what is written in their Scriptures. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection because they did not find it **explicitly** taught anywhere in the first five books of Moses, the Pentateuch. The Sadducees acknowledged only these five books in Scripture as divine revelation.

The **Pharisees** did accept that doctrine of resurrection. They included the oral tradition that grew up out of interpretation of written tradition.

Our Catechism teaches the progressive revelation of the Resurrection. The Catechism references [paragraph 992] the words of the first brother martyred in today's reading from 2 Maccabees. The books of Maccabees are also a source of why we pray for those who have died before us. 1 and 2 Maccabees are 2 of the 7 apocryphal books in our bible that Protestants do not accept as divinely inspired.

Just consider the **courage** of the brothers as they were martyred. We not only hear of their faith in God, but also of their belief in the resurrection.

- The first brother asserts that God will raise the faithful again. He said, "... *the King of the world will **raise us up to live again forever.***"
- The second brother believes that his body will share in the resurrection. He said, "*It was from Heaven that I received these; ... [and] from him I hope to receive them again.*"
- The third brother insists that only the righteous will be raised to life. He said, "*It is my choice to die at the hands of men with the **hope** God gives of being **raised up** by him; but for you [his executioners], there will be no **resurrection to life.***"

This weekend's readings remind us of the truths of our Faith that we profess in the Creed. These beliefs express the goal and purpose of God's plan for us, for the resurrection of our body and life everlasting. If there is no resurrection, the whole structure of our faith collapses.

The **resurrection** gives **meaning to life**. ... I wonder what the Sadducees believed was the meaning of life. I also wonder what today's atheists believe is the meaning of life. I cannot imagine living without the hope and belief in the resurrection.

Jesus makes two points about the resurrection in today's Gospel.

The first point, that the Sadducees misunderstood heaven. In the resurrection, some things change, including human relationships like marriage. Marriage is for **this** world. One of marriage's essential ends is procreation, to go forth and multiply. And in heaven, there is no more procreation.

Jesus exposes the Sadducees' false assumption that marriage remains unchanged.

Second, Jesus proves the reality of the resurrection to the skeptical Sadducees using a technique called **midrash**, which explains Scripture using **other** Scripture. Using midrash, Jesus shows how the Sadducees' Scriptures do teach the resurrection.

Jesus referenced the Sadducees ancestors, people like Moses. Jesus refers to Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush in the book of Exodus. [Exodus 3:6] God **is** the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The implication that God is **still** the God of these ancestors, who had been dead on earth for hundreds of earthly years, states that the God of the Israelites is the God of the living, not the God of the dead. This means that somehow the Sadducees' ancestors are still alive.

The deaths we heard of in the first reading are of martyrs, faithful Israelites, who died for their faith. They were blessed with heroic **courage**.

Courage is perhaps the hardest of all the virtues because it involves sacrifice and suffering. And **courage** is necessary for all the other virtues because they all require sacrifice, the sacrifice of our own will.

The virtue of Courage gives us the ability to dare to **say**, "thy will be done" **and** to **act** on that petition, to do the right thing no matter the cost.

Let us pray for an increase in the virtue of **Courage**. Pray to have courage and faith like the Maccabean martyrs, who not only had **faith** in God, but also **hope** in the resurrection. Then with the grace of God, one day you **will** arrive in heaven, and you **will** meet your beloved, who **will** be more alive than they ever were. And so will **you**.