

**Reflection on the Gospel-32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time C
(Luke 20:27-38)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Is there life after death? If so, what does that mean? Will we be united in death with those whom we have loved in this life? Do the bonds of love experienced in this life continue beyond the grave? Are our loved ones far from us in death? How do they live on, if indeed they do? These are questions that have preoccupied human beings for millennia. Our Christian faith tradition, grounded in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, offers no clear answer to any of these questions. It simply offers a call to faith in life after death and in God as “not of the dead, but of the living.”

As the liturgical year draws to a close, the readings invite us to ponder this mystery of the bonds of love that persist, even after death, in unimagined and unimaginable way. Some Sadducees “who say there is no resurrection” put a loaded question or case study to Jesus in an attempt to expose as nonsensical the Pharisaic belief in resurrection. In the process, they try to discredit Jesus as a teacher of the Law. As usual, Jesus refuses to be entrapped. The diversity of Jewish opinion and belief reflected in this passage may come as a surprise to those who think of Judaism at the time of Jesus as a religion with a unified theological system. There was certainly agreement among the parties or sects on four key aspects of Jewish faith, namely, monotheism (belief in one God); election (Israel as God’s chosen people); Torah (the call to be faithful to the Law of Moses as found in the first five books of the Bible); and Temple (the Jerusalem Temple as the meeting place between God and God’s people). At the same time, there was room for considerable diversity. Life after death and the resurrection of the dead were among the many contested beliefs.

Recently, as I sat with a dying Mercy friend who maintained a twinkle in her eye despite her declining health, I pondered the mysteries of life and death. She knew in her heart that her loved ones who have died are “alive to God”, as the Lukan Jesus puts it. I also knew in my heart that the life she had generated and the love she had known and brought to others over the best part of a century somehow continues and is transformed beyond our imagination through the grace of the God of the living. For the moment, that is sufficient response to the reading for this Sunday. Jesus of Nazareth refuses entrapment and invites belief in a God for whom all the dead are alive. We live by faith in God and in hope of resurrection, of the transformation of every being.

Luke 20:27-38 Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; then the second and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. Finally the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her." Jesus said to them, "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. And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of God 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 God all of them are alive."