



The Holy See

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GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Our bodies will share in the Resurrection

1. “Our commonwealth”, the Apostle Paul teaches, “is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself” (*Phil 3:20-21*).

Just as the Holy Spirit transformed the body of Jesus Christ when the Father raised him from the dead, so the same Spirit will clothe our bodies with Christ’s glory. St Paul writes: “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit who dwells in you” (*Rom 8:11*).

2. From the start, Christian faith in the resurrection of the flesh has encountered misunderstanding and opposition. The Apostle experienced this firsthand when he was proclaiming the Gospel in the middle of the Areopagus in Athens: “When they heard of the resurrection of the dead”, the Acts of the Apostles recounts, “some mocked; but others said, ‘We will hear you again about this’” (*Acts 17:32*).

This difficulty has been raised in our time as well. On the one hand, even those who believe in some form of survival after death react sceptically to the truth of faith that clarifies this ultimate question of human existence in the light of Jesus Christ’s Resurrection. On the other, many have noted the fascination with a belief like reincarnation, which is rooted in the religious soil of certain Eastern cultures (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 9).

Christian revelation is not satisfied with a vague sense of survival, although it appreciates the

intimation of immortality expressed in the teaching of some great God-seekers. We can also agree that the idea of reincarnation arose from an intense desire for immortality and from the perception that human life is the “test” in view of an ultimate end, as well as from the need for complete purification in order to attain communion with God. However, reincarnation does not ensure the unique, individual identity of each human creature as the object of God’s personal love, nor the integrity of human existence as “incarnate spirit”.

3. The witness of the New Testament emphasizes first of all the realism of the Resurrection, corporal as well, of Jesus Christ. The Apostles explicitly attest to this when referring to their experience of the risen Lord’s appearances: “God raised him on the third day and made him manifest ... to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead” (*Acts* 10:40-41). The fourth Gospel also stresses this realism when, for example, it recounts the episode in which the Apostle Thomas is invited by Jesus to put his finger in the mark of the nails and his hand in the Lord’s pierced side (cf. *Jn* 20:24-29). And in the appearance at the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, the risen Jesus “took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish” (*Jn* 21:13).

The realism of these appearances testifies that Jesus rose with his body and lives with this body at the Father’s side. However, it is a glorious body that is no longer subject to the laws of space and time, transformed in the glory of the Father. In the risen Christ we see revealed that eschatological state which all those who accept his Redemption are one day called to reach, preceded by the Blessed Virgin who, “when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory” (Pius XII, Apost. Const. *Munificentissimus Deus*, 1 Nov. 1950, DS 3903; cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 59).

4. Referring to the account of creation in the book of Genesis and interpreting Jesus’ Resurrection as the “new creation”, the Apostle Paul can thus say: “The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit” (1 *Cor* 15:45). In a mysterious but real way, all who believe in Christ share in his glorified reality through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, in Christ “all will rise again with the bodies which they now bear” (Fourth Lateran Council, DS 801), but this body of ours will be changed into a glorious body (cf. *Phil* 3:21), into a “spiritual body” (1 *Cor* 15:44). When some ask Paul: “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?”, he answers them in the First Letter to the Corinthians, using the image of the seed which dies in order to open into new life: “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.... So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown in a physical body; it is raised in a spiritual body.... For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality” (1 *Cor* 15:36-37, 42-44, 53).

Certainly, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains, “how” this will come about “exceeds our imagination and understanding; it is accessible only to faith. Yet our participation in the Eucharist already gives us a foretaste of Christ’s transfiguration of our bodies” (n. 1000).

Through the Eucharist Jesus gives us, under the appearances of bread and wine, his flesh which is enlivened by the Holy Spirit and gives life to our flesh, so that we can share in his Resurrection and state of glory with all our being, spirit and body. In this regard St Irenaeus of Lyons teaches: “Just as bread that comes from the earth, after God’s blessing has been invoked upon it, is no longer ordinary bread, but Eucharist, formed of two things, the one earthly and the other heavenly: so too our bodies, which partake of the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, but possess the hope of resurrection” (*Adversus Haereses*, IV, 18, 4-5).

5. What we have said thus far, synthesizing the teaching of Sacred Scripture and the Church’s Tradition, explains why “the Christian Creed ... culminates in the proclamation of the resurrection of the body on the last day, and in life everlasting” (*CCC*, n. 988). By the Incarnation the Word of God has taken on human flesh (cf. *Jn* 1:14), enabling it to share, through his Death and Resurrection, in his own glory as the Father’s Only-begotten Son. Through the gifts of the Spirit, the Father instils in all man’s being and, in a certain way, in the universe itself, a yearning for this destiny. As St Paul says: “The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God ... because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (*Rom* 8:19-21).

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I warmly greet the consecrated members of the Mary Ward Institute present at this Audience. I extend a sincere welcome to the members of the *American College of Trial Lawyers*, as well as to the participants in the Congress of *The European Law Students’ Association*. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Denmark, the Philippines and the United States, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To the Spanish-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father appealed for aid to the peoples devastated by hurricane Mitch:

I am deeply saddened to receive the alarming news of the great number of victims from hurricane Mitch in Central America and the Caribbean, mostly in Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. While praying for the deceased, I express all my spiritual closeness to the countless people afflicted by this disaster. At the same time, I ardently appeal particularly to public and private institutions, as well as to all people of goodwill, that they may be moved by sentiments of

fraternal solidarity to offer every kind of aid to the communities affected and to provide the necessary assistance at this difficult time of destruction and death. As an expression of my concern and closeness to these beloved peoples, I give them my Apostolic Blessing.

The Holy Father concluded by thanking everyone for their prayers on his name-day.

I am deeply grateful for the best wishes and prayers I have received for my name-day. St Charles Borromeo was a great Pastor whose shining example has always guided and supported me. To his intercession I entrust my ministry and that of all the Bishops and priests of the Church.