

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Gospel gives us insight into marriage, the kingdom of heaven, and the humor of God.

When people hear Jesus' words in today's Gospel, "*The children of this age marry and remarry; but those who are deemed worthy to attain to the coming age and to the resurrection of the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage,*" they often interpret them as a put-down of marriage. They believe Jesus is devaluing marriage compared to celibacy. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Rather Jesus is reminding us that in the kingdom of heaven we will enjoy fulness of life without any of the limitations of this life.

To understand the passage, we have to understand the first verse. Unlike the Pharisees, the Sadducees denied the possibility of resurrection. They did not believe in life after death. In this passage, they tried to apply the levirate law to show the illogic of resurrection. According to the Jewish levirate law, if a man died without having children, his brother was obliged to marry the widow to carry on his brother's lineage. In this case, seven brothers married the same woman, and all died childless. If there is a resurrection, whose wife will she be? Jesus responds that in heaven people are not married.

At the end of the passage, Jesus affirms that the dead will rise by referring to God's words to Moses at the burning bush: "*I am ... the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob*" [Exodus 3:6a], concluding that God is not the God of the dead but of the living.

I would suggest that in heaven we will not only be alive, but also will have complete intimacy with God and others. Intimacy in this context is knowing and being known, loving and being loved. We will know and love all people; we will be known and be loved by all people. Heaven will truly be the communion of saints. The First Letter of John gives us an additional insight into what life will be like in the kingdom of heaven: "*Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*" [3:2]. In other words, we will be transformed into the likeness of the Risen Christ which is also to say we will become the best version of ourselves.

As I mentioned, Jesus was not disparaging marriage in today's Gospel. Because of the limitations of this life, we are limited to one husband or wife. At one of our priest wellness programs, a psychologist argued that it is difficult even to have more than a few intimate relationships. Intimate relationships take a lot of time, energy, and effort. Anyone who has been married and/or had children knows how much time, energy, and effort these relationships require.

Finally, my brothers and sisters, if Scripture is inspired by God, this passage reveals God's sense of humor. The extreme example the Sadducees posed to Jesus would have evoked laughter. Many years ago, Scripture scholar Marcian Strange wrote an article entitled "God and Laughter."¹ In the article, he suggested that sometimes we are unable to recognize the playfulness of God. However, Scripture suggests that the God we worship is both serious and playful. I would add that if we are in the image and likeness of God, we all need both serious and playful times in our lives.

¹Marcian Strange, "God and Laughter," *Worship*, (Vol. 45, Number 1, January 1971), 2-12.