

Living in the Resurrection

In his letter to the Galatians, St Paul makes the following amazing assertion: *The life that I am now living, subject to the limits of human nature, I am living in faith, faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.* It is amazing because it makes Christ's sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection from the dead absolutely crucial to everything that St Paul understands about his own life and his own death. Now we know that St Paul never met Jesus, never encountered him "in the flesh", never saw him and never spoke to him, and yet he says with utter conviction that Jesus gave himself up for him personally. In the same way, you and I will never encounter Jesus "in the flesh", yet because we believe that Christ *died for all*, it must be, that like St Paul, each of us is able to affirm that Jesus loves me and that he gave himself up for me. The question is how are we to understand what this means in terms of both who I am and what I am to be?

The Christian faith has at its heart an act of love, and because God is love, it is an act of God. It is an act that is at the same time boundless, limitless, and selfless. It is an act that is without restriction, open to all and for all. This act of love is the incarnation; the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and if we believe that Christ died for all, it is the act to which all our lives are subject. In his life, Jesus, through his love for me, opened up a pathway by which I am able to experience this love in my life, subject to the limits of my human nature. In his death on the cross, Jesus, through his love for me, experienced the limits of this human nature as dispositions which question and challenge this love. By his resurrection, Jesus, through his love for me, overcomes (*note the present tense*) these human limits and breaks them open, showing that God's act of love is truly boundless, limitless and selfless.

Are we able to say anything comprehensible about what this all signifies? Yes I think we can. We can say that we are already living in the resurrection but subject to the limits of our human nature, because our life in Christ is not yet fully formed. We all know that our human lives will come to their natural end, when the limits of our bodies acknowledge our mortality. In respect of who I am, this moment is fixed, both in time and in fact. At death what I am to others by my past deeds, is now beyond change or challenge. If I have tried to live in the resurrection then that incarnate love of Christ, touched my conscience, and worked its way through me into the world and left its value in some limited form. Yet this act of love still proceeds. The power of the resurrection does not stop with my passing and nor will the incarnate love of God, of which I am but one miniscule part, be restrained. Thus the question of what I am to be, arises. All I can say is that I will be alive in the resurrection but no longer limited by my human nature. Does that mean anything? For a Christian it means life in God. Can we put it into words? John McDade SJ former Principal of Heythrop College London puts it like this:

Now it's no accident that when the Catholic imagination tells the story of how we journey finally into the depths of God, it thinks of the final stages of this journey as a purification by which all that is contingent and selfish is drawn from us and what remains of us is simply loving God. As Philip Larkin puts it in one of his poems, 'All that remains of us is love'. Our imaginative story of Purgatory is a canonical, endlessly rich way of glimpsing a truth at the heart of how we are purified so that we become persons in God.

Extract from Judgement and Purgatory Written by John McDade SJ

Becoming a *person in God* is living in the resurrection.