

Do you believe in life after death?" the boss asked one of his employees.

"No, No Sir." the new recruit replied.

"Well, you better begin to believe," the boss went on, "because after you left early yesterday to go to your grandmother's funeral, she stopped by to see you".

Yes, life after death. It has been mankind's biggest question: "Is there life after death?" Since the time immemorial, the human beings have been trying to find the answers to this question. What happens after death. Various religions have proposed various answers to this question. Pyramids in Egypt are ample proof of human kind's believe in some kind of life after death. In Hinduism the life after death is in the form of rebirth. After the soul leaves the body, at the moment of death, it is eligible for rebirth as human, animal, vegetable or mineral. One will be reborn a couple of million times, in various forms including t before finally attaining moksha or eternal life or eternal damnation. No wonder they avoid eating meat. Who knows the chicken you are eating could be your great uncle born in the form of chicken in this life?

As we near the end of the Church's liturgical year, the readings become more eschatological — having to do with the end times. The main theme of today's readings is about the life after death and of the relationship between our lives on earth and the life of glory or punishment that will follow after death.

In the first reading of today we have the story of the martyrdom of seven brothers who urged by their mother remained faithful to God with the hope that they will enjoy the glory of the resurrection to come. Each one of them was willing to die for the Law of Moses because they believed in after life and that at the last trumpet, the King of the universe would raise them up to an everlasting life. They were ready to die rather than sin, trusting in the Lord God to raise them up again with their bodies being fully restored. What was it that gave them the strength to endure such torture? What is it that gives so many of our present day the strength to endure suffering? It is faith, belief in the existence of the next life, faith in the resurrection, belief that all the wrongs of this life will be put right in the next life.

The same theme of the resurrection of the dead is the basis of the confrontation described in today's Gospel passage. Jesus ingeniously escapes from a doctrinal trap set for him and explains the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, supported by the Pharisees and denied by the Sadducees. Jesus declares that heavenly life with God in glory is totally different from earthly life, explaining that there is no marriage in heaven in the earthly sense. Jesus said, in Luke 20:36 they are like angels...". There is a radical difference between our earthly body and our body in the next life. The best way to think about our heavenly body is that we will be "like angels."

Just like the Maccabee brothers, who stood up for their faith, for their values and got martyred, Christianity also presents a long list of martyrs to her credit. The early history

of Christianity is written in the blood of her martyrs. It is said that the first Christians used to march to the Roman killing fields singing psalms and dancing for joy for their imminent glorification. Christians all over the world continue to get martyred for their faith even today. Just to give you one example when I myself almost got martyred.

In August 2008, a large-scale persecution of Christians in my neighboring diocese began lasting for six months. Since my parish was in the border, we also lived in fear of being attacked. At night strong men from the parish used to come to guard the church and rectory. During this six month of persecution more than 600 villages were ransacked, 5,600 houses were looted and burnt, 54,000 people were left homeless, more than 100 Christians were killed and 232 churches destroyed. The attackers who were fanatic Hindus, used to say to every Christian they attacked: "Give up Christianity, say you are a Hindu". But these first-generation Christians preferred to die than to give up their faith. What gave them courage and strength? Their faith in after life, their belief in resurrection. So, they willingly embrace death to preserve their faith and their Christian values.

I wonder, what percent of American Christians would be ready to die if such situation ever arises?

Fortunately, there are no physical attacks in this country on Christians but Christian values are attacked, socially as well as legally. A member of a family could be misunderstood and ridiculed because he or she prays or goes to Mass. Think of children in school could be laughed at for keeping up their bodily purity until marriage. Lifelong Catholics holding one set of values in private and another set of values in public in fear of losing their job or political status.

So, just like the Maccabee brothers and Christian martyrs, at the time of difficulties and hardships in life, faith in resurrection should help us to stand up to our faith and our values. Does, your faith become shaky, with little inconvenience like change in Mass times or disagreement with the administration? Are you willingly to stand up for your values even in public no matter what happens to your social and public life?