

Remember, remember

In November I recall the life I shared with my parents and grandparents. I remember how, after my father's death, I became my mother's visitor one day in the week, and how often I picked her up from the depression and lack of meaning she suffered as she got older and iller, and how I always cooked her a splendid dinner and opened a bottle of wine, and left her feeling life wasn't so bad. This was a very quiet form of evangelism, but it was a work of faith as well as a work of love, because she suffered cancer for 35 years, and this made her life into a challenged and contingent one, strung out between hospital appointments. The beliefs we have form a treasury of the way we understand life and its ultimate purpose, our ultimate meaning. Our faith in God transforms the way we think about the world and very particularly the way we think about death. My mother and I knew that very well.

We do not build our understanding without great hardship. We have beliefs about God that are developed and exceedingly well-thought out. As a Church we have paid for these beliefs by a great deal of suffering and strife, division and argument. This is because when people believe things which are not true, their lives are opened to many wrong courses of action. Bad faith damages life, and really bad faith makes us killers. We must take care of what we believe; and in this our modern world has failed, and our own country has failed very badly, and is paying the price in great suffering, violence, and fear.

We have noticed that human beings live in time, and our time is precious, because it makes us present to each other. But it is also lethal, in that it finally carries us away. Still, we believe very deeply that human beings are *ultimately* precious, and that a world that makes sense cannot treat them as disposable; the placing of other values above the value of humanity is abhorrent to us, and if someone allows others to die in order to be rich or healthy himself, we know that a great crime is being committed. Yet in God we believe that there must be a value higher than this life of ours, because *all* his living creatures, even the human ones, die.

We have come to know that God, as the Creator of all that passes, cannot be subject to death himself, and that therefore he cannot be subject to *time*. Nor can our other great limitation, *place*, apply to his life, for he must never be absent from what he upholds. Nor is his *knowledge* limited like ours, because he is the fount of all being, and all knowledge must belong to him. Clearly God is not a human being. This is the truth which we work out for ourselves; but Jesus knew it, and this is what he is telling the Sadducees in today's Gospel.

Jesus' dismissal of their story of the woman and the brothers can serve us well, in warning us how *not* to think of the future. When we go to God, and "become like him, because we see him as he is", our life will be vastly different. When I think of being reunited with my relatives who have died, I don't expect we shall ever sit around eating lumpy custard and smarting from a row over coming in late! Despite all my happy memories of smoked salmon and roast beef, I feel sure that I have cooked my last meal for my mother and father. We shan't inhabit the same world of chairs and tables, pots and pans, any more than we shall be subject to arthritis, progressive heart disease, or cancer. We must do what the Psalmist says, when he cries out: *Lift up your heads, ye gates: grow higher, ancient doors: let the Lord enter in!* We should meditate on the timeless, limitless God who knows all things. We should recall in this context all the pitiable facts of death which made our loved ones suffer, their lives disappointing and mean. All of this is in the dead past. The future is bright with immortality. All of this I read in the effortless dismissal Jesus serves on the Sadducees, and their rather timebound story of a woman whose life in this world was a story of failures.