Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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"God is not God of the dead but of the living" (Mark 12:27).

Tb 3:1-11a, 16-17a; *Mk 12:18-27*

In today’s Gospel we continue Mark’s account of the challenges Jesus meets from his opponents. Yesterday it was on whether to pay Roman taxes. Today it is the Sadducees, the ruling conservatives who did not believe in resurrection, testing Jesus about who will be husband in heaven to a woman who had married seven brothers. Mark’s Gospel may allude to the painful fate in the Book of Tobit of poor Sarah, who suffered a succession of dead husbands on her wedding night. It takes the archangel Raphael and a determined and prayerful Tobias to rescue her.

In both cases, Jesus forces his interlocutors deeper than they intend to go in the challenges of believing in the living God. The absurd and artificial scenario about marriage and the importance of progeny as a kind of immortality elicits Jesus' rebuke: "Are you not misled because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?"

Then Jesus says something that resonates with some our own debates over the nature of marriage and procreation. He distinguishes marriage as essential to earthly life but not needed in eternity, where life will continue forever. Resurrection transforms us and transcends the need to marry to keep having children.

This is a profound mystery. Theology has yet to really explore Paul’s insight that in the risen Christ there is neither male nor female. Nor will there be straight or gay or transgender, but instead the wholeness of our human identity and capacity to love. We know nothing of Jesus’ sexuality, and yet so much about his boundless capacity for friendship and love for everyone. Isn’t this a window into what we ourselves will be like in our risen lives?

Questions of gender and sex pass forward into holiness and love, the fullness of human life blossoming into friendship with God and one another. Mature men and women show both masculine and feminine qualities, beauty and wisdom that exceed the cultural stereotypes that define male and female.

What we intuit now in our communion as the body of Christ is our shared life in glory. Sexual longing is only a foretaste and glimpse of the intimacy we will enjoy with everyone in heaven. Procreation foreshadows the expanding circle of divine love that will gather the entire universe into one new creation.

To miss all of this to protect a small-minded ideology was the tragic mistake Jesus rebuked in his critics. Your God is too small, your hopes too contained and your hearts too constricted, he seemed to say. God is the God of the living, so get beyond

your scruples and join the circle of life, both here on earth and in the world to come.