

We are faced here with the meaning of life in the face of death, or just as well, the meaning of death in the face of life. Does one negate the other? And one comes immediately to the fact of resurrection, that is, to the belief that life is not ended at death but we live in hope that, somehow, life continues – that whoever and whatever we are there is an ‘afterlife’ – symbolised and effected by that word *resurrection*; death intervenes but we are, nonetheless, raised to life again in Christ. *In Christ* is the key to it for his own resurrection gives us hope for ours – that is, for life after death. And today’s gospel beautifully captures this tension between life and death by interpolating one story within another so that while the woman with the haemorrhage is, in one sense, being brought back to life again within this life, her doppelganger of twelve years, the young daughter of Jairus, is allowed to die in order to be raised again. Their respective passages from ‘death’ to ‘life’ and ‘life’ to ‘death’ are mapped exactly on one another and give life and death a much more fluid meaning than otherwise: the borders or boundaries between them are permeable after all. And the one who controls the boundary is Christ, acting in the power of God, the creator and sustainer of all things. So it’s a story of God putting death in its place as part of God’s overriding control of all that God has made, including death. Now, that’s the tricky part, because we don’t want to attribute death to God. That is what the first reading from Wisdom is all about: ‘death was not God’s doing; it was the devil’s envy that brought death into the world’ – and so on. But one interpretation of the devil here, is not of a supernatural being to rival God in anyway, but as ‘the Adversary’ or whoever it is in God’s creation who opposes God, and this is first symbolised by Adam and Eve and even more so by Cain in the killing of his brother, Abel. So rather than excusing either God or humankind from the creation of death or, one might say, the *evil* of death, and death as a symbol of evil, we have to face it as there from the beginning, as part and parcel of whatever creation is about; but the fact of it being within God’s creation also gives us hope that, as with the story of Jairus’ daughter and the woman with the haemorrhage, death, whether physical or symbolic, is within God’s power to overcome, that is, to re-create. And this belief in the ultimate power of God we call faith, and it is beautifully captured in the Coptic prayer of commendation we often use when we celebrate the passing of life into death and death into life of a person we’ve known and loved here:

Eternal God

who know hidden things before they exist
 who brought all things into being from nothing,
 who hold the power over life and death:
 our creation is among your mysteries,
 a mystery is our returning to the dust,
 a mystery our resurrection to eternal life.

Receive, Lord, the soul of your servant

If he/she has sinned against you in (this)life
 forgive him/her and pardon him/her
 because you created us for life, not for destruction

for you are a God merciful and compassionate,
 to whom, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
 we give praise and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

So we cling to Christ both to pass from death to life in this life and to pass from death to life in the life to come for, in Christ, death has, indeed, lost its sting.

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