

Grace and Peace be to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

This advent, we have been exploring how the incarnation of Jesus defines our whole reality. We have created bodies made in the image of God, who is Christ, our Lord. We have Spiritual bodies which are made alive, sustained, and bear fruit by the Spirit of Christ. We have Spousal bodies created for a one-flesh union with Jesus as we are made to be members of His Bride.

But what is the purpose of it all? Why are we being remade into the image of God's incarnate Son? Why did Jesus come in human flesh to unite Himself with us in our flesh? Jesus reveals the answer perhaps most clearly in His conversation with Martha, who was mourning the death of her brother Lazarus. Martha, like us, understood well enough that God has promised to overcome death. "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." The problem was that Martha, like many, did not understand Jesus rightly enough. Martha did not understand the significance of Jesus. She did not understand the significance of Jesus, the Son of God, coming in human flesh. Instead, she continued looking forward to a future act of God's deliverance.

But that deliverance she so desperately longed for, the resurrection she grieved had not yet come, was standing before her, hidden in human flesh so that it could only be received by faith. Jesus said to her, "I *am* the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." What's amazing about Jesus' answer is that it, like Him, hides the truth in plain sight. Jesus' words aren't contradictory. They declare first what is seen by the eyes, and then what is seen by faith. "Though he die yet shall he live," and "He shall never die."

God did not create us as bodies meant to be discarded in death. God created us as spiritual, spousal, living bodies. Death comes through sin and rebellion against God. When Jesus taught His disciples what is necessary for our life, He teaches two perspectives: from the body and from the spirit. However, Jesus never talks about the body and soul as separate, except when He teaches about death. Yet death is the ultimate enemy that Jesus came bodily to destroy. Death is the very reason the Son of God took on human flesh.

"For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal body puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

You see, Martha saw death with her eyes. Her brother had died. His body was in the tomb for four days. However, Lazarus, on account of faith, was not dead. His spirit had already been raised to new life in Jesus, with whom Lazarus was now hidden from the eyes. And so Jesus gently corrected Martha's understanding of who He is. "Martha, I am the resurrection and the life. I am what you have been waiting for." Yet this can only be seen by faith. So Jesus asks, "Do you believe this?"

To confirm Martha's faith, and everyone who confesses with her, that "Yes, you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world," Jesus then calls Lazarus from the hidden life to the life of sight by reuniting his body and soul once more. In this act, Jesus was showing Martha, and all of us, that we are created to be living bodies. Even though we have been marred and scarred by our rebellion against Him, He redeemed and sanctified us through the incarnation of His Son, who in love gave Himself for us.

Through baptism, our earthly bodies are now one flesh with Jesus in this life, like a bride and her groom, just as our bodies will be united with His glorified body forever in the life to come. Since we are one with Him in body and soul, He now presents us with our holy and blameless bodies to God the Father as we live by faith in Him. As a result, God the Father now sees us from three different points of view:

as we once were apart from His Son, as we now are in His Son, and as we will be together with His Son. But not in that order. His final vision of us comes from His purpose for us, which colors how He now sees us.

First, He sees as we will be when we are face to face with Him together with His Son in the life to come. He now regards us as perfect people with our resurrected and glorified bodies. And as He considers us, He is pleased with what He sees. He is proud of us.

Second, He regards our present bodies in that light because we are now hidden in His Son, dressed up, as it were, with Christ as our garment. He considers us as people who have been covered with the righteousness and purity, the holiness and beauty, of Jesus. When He looks at us and our bodies, He sees Jesus in us and us in Jesus. And so He is not ashamed to be called our God, just as Jesus is not ashamed to call us His brothers and sisters. God approves of us and is just as pleased with us as He is with Jesus. He, therefore, says to each believer, “You are my beloved son; you are my beloved daughter. I am well pleased with you.”

Third, even though our heavenly Father admires us as the beautiful bride of His Son, He does not overlook our sin and gloss over its gravity. He sees our sin much more clearly than we ever do. He considers all our misbehavior as well as our mistrustful heart. But He does not reject us because we are sinful and unclean. Rather, He uses our sin to bring us back to Him, to remake us in the image of His Son. He puts our sinful self to death with Jesus to raise us up as new people with Jesus. He sees us as sinners whom He pardons and transforms more and more fully so that we are worthy of the eternal life He gives.

So how, then, shall we consider our bodies in light of the incarnation of Jesus? There are many possible ways, but let us conclude our series by considering the gift of identity God has given us in our created bodies. My body is always located somewhere in its journey on earth—not anywhere, nor everywhere, but somewhere. It can only be in one place with certain people and certain things at any point in time. It moves from place to place, yet each place is not equally important. The most important place at any stage of my life is my home. It is my point of orientation, the place where I am. I visit many other places, but I do not live there. My home is the place where I live in my body.

In all, I have had three homes, the personal places where my body is at home with those who are one flesh with me. They are the places that God has assigned me to be during my life in the body. They show where my body has come from, where it is now, and where it will be forever. My first home was and is with my parents and four siblings. It is my first home because God created my body through my father and mother. It is not tied to the house of my childhood but to the people. My body comes from them and is still connected to them in countless ways. My home is where my mother was living with my father. Whenever I was there with them, my body was at home in that place.

My second home is with my wife and our four children. It is the second location God has provided for my body by giving Marie to me in marriage. I am now one flesh with her and at home with her. My body belongs to her, just as her body belongs to me. My home is wherever we have lived together as a married couple. Even though we have occupied six separate residencies in four different cities, I have had one home with her for nearly eleven years. She is the fixed, unaltered physical point of orientation for me with my ever-changing body.

My third home is with Jesus and His Father. That home is the house of the heavenly Father, which belongs to Jesus as His Son. It is His home that He shares with all His saints. It is that place where Jesus is at home with us and where we are at home with Him. His home is the Church that, like Him, is located both in heaven and earth. His home became my home when I was baptized and has remained my home ever since. In the Church, I live my life in the body together with Jesus.

Like the houses that have served as places of residence for me at various stages in life, I have been connected to seven different congregations, a member of three of them. Yet all the while, I have belonged to only one church. I have had only one heavenly home here on earth. Since my baptism, the eternal home for my earthly body has been the one holy catholic and apostolic church, which is the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem. That has been my true home even while living in different places here on earth.

My body has been wonderfully made and even more wonderfully remade for life with Jesus in that eternal home. That is where it belongs. That is where it longs to be at rest. That is the hope of its journey here on earth. That is where it will, at last, be at home forever. I cannot but thank my heavenly Father for providing that eternal home for my body through His Son, both now, in this age, and forever in the age to come. He has made me, and all of us, living bodies to live with Him eternally.

Anyone who does not understand these truths about the bodies God has given to us will not understand the value of being made in the image of God and receiving our identity from Him. They will not understand the value of being made as spiritual bodies bearing the fruit of God's Spirit in this life. They will not understand the value of being made as spousal bodies, oriented for communion with God and fellowship with one another. They will not understand the value of being made as living bodies, not meant for death but to dwell with God for all eternity. But most importantly, they will not understand the importance of Jesus being born in our human flesh on Christmas Day.

Jesus came in our flesh to be at home with us, body and soul, that we may, in turn, be at home with Him, body and soul, now and forever. May we who believe in Christ, the Son of God, receive and delight in the truth of our bodies in light of His incarnation. Amen.