



# the CATHOLIC NAVIGATOR

Aboard St. Peter's Barque with the Catechism Charting Our Course

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## Some Say...

...the reason that Jesus was put to death was because

- ~ he failed to deliver the freedom from Roman rule that they assumed the Messiah would bring. Or,
- ~ the high priests saw the people's belief in Jesus growing and this made them feel threatened. Or,
- ~ the people feared what would happen to them if the Romans saw Jesus' popularity grow.

## While Others Say...

- ~ Jesus had to go because he equated himself with God. Or,
- ~ Jesus threatened the status quo by redefining who one's neighbor was and what you owed him. Or,
- ~ Jesus's power (as seen in the raising of Lazarus, Jn. 11:47-53) was growing too great and frightened the rulers of the day.

## What Do You Say?

## Old Testament Times

In today's Gospel Jesus says to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (Jn. 11:25-26) Close friends of Jesus like Martha could answer "Yes." But what of the ordinary, observant Jew hearing words like this? Was such a person open to the promise of eternal life? It would seem so.

The Hebrew term *Olam Ha-Ba* means *the world to come*, the Messianic Age, and affirms the belief in an afterlife. But Jewish Scripture adds little to this. More support for an afterlife comes from reflection on God's covenant with his people and on the teachings of rabbis. Early experience was that God dealt with the just and the unjust in this life with quick and concrete rewards and punishments. But too often really bad things happened to really good people. Thus, it just seemed right that a loving God should provide something beyond life for those of his people who suffered so much without fault. Perhaps they would join their ancestors, awaiting resurrection in the shadowy existence of *She'ol*. Perhaps they slept until awakened by the Messiah to live in the *Olam Ha-Ba*. Or perhaps they went immediately to a place like a heaven.

Individual imagination has contributed much to the relative silence of Jewish scripture, but scripture is not totally silent. Daniel 12:2 states, "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some to everlasting life, others to reproach and everlasting disgrace." This, along with many hints in the first five books of the Old Testament (Torah), encouraged the Pharisees to hold to an afterlife, contrary to the Sadducees who denied what was not explicitly mentioned in Torah.

## Mary Who?

We can get confused about the Marys mentioned in the gospels. We know who Mary, Mother of Jesus, is, but the other women named Mary need a closer look. Mary of Bethany, sister of Martha and Lazarus, appears in today's Gospel reading (John 11: 1-45). Mary of Magdala (Magdalen) is introduced as the woman from whom seven demons were expelled in Luke (8:2). In Mark (15:40-47) one of the women who witnessed Jesus' crucifixion is a Mary, the mother of James and Joses, who might also be Mary, wife of Clophas (John 19: 25).

Three of these 'four' Marys stood at the foot of the cross. One of these Marys *anointed Jesus' feet with oil* and dried them with her hair (see Mk 14: 3-9; Jn 12: 1-8; Mt 26: 6-13); this was Mary of Bethany. Early on, though, the idea emerged that she could really be Mary of Magdala, first to see Jesus after his resurrection (Jn 20: 11-18). Then there was an unnamed sinful woman who *washed Jesus' feet with her tears* and dried them with her hair (Lk 7:36-50). Somehow over time the Marys of Bethany and Magdala, were merged (conflated) and named as the repentant harlot.

Because the Gospels are really about Jesus, the writers are often short on details about the 'supporting cast'. Two key words contribute to our confusion: 'demons' and 'Magdala'. To expel seven demons could be one way of saying that Jesus cured this Mary of a serious illness. Also, this Mary could be 'of Magdala'-- from that town on the Sea of Galilee-- not 'the *magdala*', a close-sounding Hebrew slang term for 'curling one's hair', a derogatory term for the prostitutes who used to fix their hair this way. My vote is for a Mary from Bethany in Judea and a Mary from Magdala in Galilee, neither of whom was of ill repute.

# It's Been Said...

...that "if there's an afterlife, there certainly is no purgatory. That is only an idea that Catholics made up later to keep you hopeful."

In fact, although the doctrine wasn't worked out until the Councils of Florence and Trent, evidence of a belief in purgatory and one's ability to intercede for soul's there is found in Scripture: "Therefore [Judas Maccabeus] made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin." (2 Mac. 12:46) Also, "If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice, why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them." (Job 1:5)



## CATECHETICAL CORNER

The idea of an afterlife appears early on in the history of man. We see allusions to it in early Jewish texts and find mentions of it in the religions of the east. Because our religion is so *Christocentric* (Christ-centered), our belief about the afterlife is both unique and filled with hope. We are called to live in the direct vision of God, "face to face, as he is" (CCC 1028):

"...The Church calls this contemplation of God in his heavenly glory 'the beatific vision.'" (CCC 1028)

As Paul says today in Romans, if we live in the Spirit, we will be raised, body and soul, through that Spirit. We will enjoy a unique afterlife because, created in God's likeness and image, we are a unique creation.

"The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the "form" of the body: i.e., it is because of its spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body; spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature." (CCC 365)

We don't know fully what it means to return to God 'body and soul.' And, we are unable to fully appreciate God and his glory here on earth. This can only happen after death when God gives us the ability to perceive him. However, "Faith makes us taste in advance the light of the beatific vision, the goal of our journey here below... So faith is already the beginning of eternal life." (CCC 1088) And, as we take care to form our bodies in line with our soul's needs, we are confident that God's justice and mercy will do the rest.

The word Purgatory comes from the word meaning *to cleanse*, or, *to purge*. Imagery of a smelter's fire burning the impurities out of metal has long been used to describe the purging process that occurs in one's soul.

Mechthild of Magdeburg, a 13<sup>th</sup> century mystic, spoke poetically about perfecting the soul's body while here on earth. By using the senses of the physical body to give glory to God rather than to glorify oneself, the soul's body would be transformed into one that could quite literally live *in God*.

Something to think about.



## SCRIPTURAL SECRETS...

Last week's readings focused on light-sight miracles. This week, one week before Jesus rides into Jerusalem, we see a shift to life-death miracles...

In the first reading, God promises to "open (your) graves and have you rise from them... (He) will put (his) spirit in you that you may live..." Some scholars say that this is a symbolic way of saying that God will restore Jerusalem. At this time, Ezekiel is trying to convince everyone that they are not punished for the sins of their parents. He is very much the prophet of "personal responsibility." But, in exile, these people constantly wondered, "Where do those find justice who did not find it here on earth?"

In the second reading, Paul promises that those who live "in the spirit," and "have Christ" within, would have their mortal bodies raised through that spirit dwelling within. This is a much more developed idea of what happens hereafter than the notion of lifting bones from the grave and animating them. In fact, this passage in Romans forms part of the foundation for our creedal statement, "I believe in the resurrection of the body...":

"... The "resurrection of the flesh" (the literal formulation of the Apostles' Creed) means not only that the immortal soul will live on after death, but that even our "mortal body" will come to life again." (CCC 989-90)

By the time we hear about the raising of Lazarus (only found in John's gospel) we are fairly certain that there is a physical component to resurrection. For John this is the culmination of the 'signs' (called 'miracles' in the other gospels) and foreshadows Christ's own death and resurrection that is to come soon.\*

\*[FYI: The story of Lazarus is the longest running story in John besides the Passion, and it contains the shortest verse to be found in the Bible: "Jesus wept." (v. 35)]