

Homily for Easter 5 2019

Readings: Acts 11:1–18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1–6; John 13:31–35

“We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come”

I wonder what goes through your mind as we say those words together each week.

Or as they appear in the Apostles’ Creed: *“I believe . . . in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting”*.

They are two separate things, although closely joined. One – the resurrection of the body says what we think about ourselves personally. We declare that after death, in the future, we won’t be spirits without bodies floating around on clouds. (By the way – it’s hard to think of anything more boring!). No, we will have bodies - real bodies like that of the risen Lord Jesus.

The other speaks of the kind of place we’ll be living in – the world to come. And there’s not a fluffy cloud in sight!

The breathtaking truth is that the same Jesus who died for our sins, who made us right with God has the future all sewn up. And it’s almost beyond description. One day he will bring in a whole new deal.

So we boldly say -

“We look for the life of the world to come”

What does that mean? What does it look like?

The last two chapters of the book of Revelation written by St John, gives us the answer. And it gives us the answer about the future so we will keep loving and serving Jesus and others in the present.

What does he say?

The life of the world to come is in a renewed creation.

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¹ *I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth were completely gone. There was no longer any sea. And verse 4 and 5 : ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sadness. There will be no more crying or pain. Things are no longer the way they used to be."*

⁵ *He who was sitting on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"*

That world is not something completely new – like our throw-away culture that chucks out the broken TV and buys a new one. No. God says, “I am making everything new”. It will be a new heaven and a new earth – a new world where everything is right. Everything that was broken fixed and better than it was before. Everything that was causing suffering and havoc either gone completely or transformed almost now unrecognizably good.

Don't you want that?

As humans we long for all the rottenness, the pain, the suffering, the imperfection, the disasters, the brokenness of this heavens and earth to be gone. In our better moments we try our hardest to deal with disease, barrenness, crop failure, drought, fire, flood – all the brokenness of this world. But we know we can't.

BUT. Jesus died, rose again and ascended to the place of all authority at the right hand of the Father.

Because of that we know a new day is coming.

It's the quality of this new world order that John underlines:

In verse 4: ⁴ *He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sadness. There will be no more crying or pain. Things are no longer the way they used to be."*

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No more need for doctors or nurses – there'll be nothing for them to do! No more illness, ageing or dying. No more final goodbyes. No more loneliness or sadness or rejection or disappointment. Nothing at all to spoil God's new creation – because sin and all its consequences have gone.

And us?

Listen to this wonderful picture in verse 2:

² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem. It was coming down out of heaven from God. It was prepared like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

That's you and me – if we belong to Christ. Just like a bride on her wedding day can be almost unrecognizable from the girl rescuing people at the beach or caring for a dying relative, so we will be almost unrecognizable. It's a picture of perfect community.

We won't be so absorbed with God that we won't be able to relate to each other. No. We will be a city – a living, breathing network of wonderful relationships. We will be able to live together perfectly. Even if you find other people hard to relate to, in the world to come those relationships will be perfect. You will be perfect and I will be perfect. (Imagine that!). And this perfection will be God's gift to us as the bride of Jesus.

And there's one more aspect of this world to come which is right at the very centre of everything.

The life of the world to come will mean a perfect relationship with God

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Listen again to verse 3:

³ *I heard a loud voice from the throne. It said, "Now God makes his home with people. He will live with them. They will be his people. And God himself will be with them and be their God."*

These words are very familiar to us. They are the way God speaks of his plans for his people right from the beginning of the Bible.

Living with his people. Them being his. Him being their God who is always with them.

For Adam and Eve it was experienced every day of their lives before their sin. They walked with the LORD God in the garden in the cool of the evening.

But right from the very start of the Bible people turned away from having God with them. Adam and Eve chose to make the rules for themselves.

In the life of ancient Israel God's people wanted more. They wanted God with them. Yes. But really only so they could do their own thing. Just having the maker and ruler of all things live with them was never enough.

But then, in the life of the world to come, it will be. And it will be so perfect that we will do what no-one in the history of this present world was able to do: "We will see his face", as John says in the next chapter.

We will enjoy being with him, not in something like an everlasting church service, but in a relationship deeper and better than anything we knew in this life.

What is the world to come like?

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It will be a renewed creation.

It will be a perfect relationship with God with no sin to muck it up.

And I hope, in the words of the Nicene Creed, that does leave you saying:

“I look for the life of the world to come.” That is, “I look forward to it. I can’t wait!”