



GOSPEL GOSSIP

One bride for seven brothers?

St Luke 20. 27-38

Sunday 9 November

There was a 1954 musical film called 'Seven Brides for Seven Brothers', but this was based on a book, which in turn was possibly based on the legend of the Rape of the Sabine women. Although there is no connection whatsoever between this and the gospel reading set for this week, there are seven brothers! However, there is just one wife... The Pharisees, who denied that there was life after death, were intent on ridiculing Jesus by asking a question about whose wife she would be after death?

They tell a very implausible story about seven brothers. The first married and died. According to the Law of Moses, such a childless wife should be married by a brother of the deceased. And this is what happens. All six further marriages resulted in death before any children were born. So when eventually the woman were to die, in heaven whose wife would she be? Such a story which stretches the bounds of common sense into the ridiculous was just the sort of things the Pharisees would love to debate about amongst themselves ad nauseam. Like 'how many angels can dance on the tip of a pin?'. Pointless and meaningless.

- Do irrelevancies concern you more than the real issues in the faith?
- Can you cope with not knowing?
- Are you tempted to run away because you can't find, or don't like, the answer?
- How often do you wish to ridicule Jesus' teaching rather than being challenged by it?
- How do you cope with those who pick holes in your belief and fail to respect it?

Let's put this passage into context. Jesus has now reached the Temple in Jerusalem, where the last stages of his life are to be played out. The Sadducees, one of the two main Jewish sects, turn their attacks specifically on him. They raise a series of charges against Jesus, trying to show that he is subverting the Law. Never resorting to any kind of violence, Jesus answers them and silences them. The Sadducees' argument, an example taken to extreme, is based on the Law as expressed in Deuteronomy 25.5, trying to demonstrate that any kind of spiritual life, such as life after death, or angels or the like, is ridiculous. In this, they are also setting themselves against the other party, the Pharisees.

The Sadducees' argument was that the afterlife was just a continuation of this present life, hence their example. Jesus counters it with quotations from the same scriptures that the Sadducees would know, but ignored in the desire to demean him. Jesus argues that God is stated to be the God of Abraham (and other patriarchs) all of who were dead. But as God is the God of the living, not the dead, it means that life for these great forebears did not end with their bodily death, but continues. Therefore, after death, there must be resurrection, a rising to a new life, which is what Jesus was beginning to show and would demonstrate.

- How do you describe resurrection?
- What is the difference between 'resurrection' and 'resuscitation'?
- What does 'for to him all of them are alive' (the closing words) actually mean to you?
- Can you be a Christian without believing in the resurrection?
- How does the resurrection show that Jesus is the Son of God?

From a ridiculous suggestion, Jesus is able to demonstrate to his critics then, and now, that it is God's will that we should have life, both in this world and in the next.