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# DOMINICANA

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## THIS DUST OF OURS

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ANNUALLY for forty days Holy Mother Church bids us mortify our flesh that our souls may be beautified. We follow the Passion of Jesus Christ and see the Flesh of God Himself scourged, spat upon, dug with nails. In an awful scene on Calvary we see the Body of Christ laid a corpse on the bosom of His sorrowful Mother. Believing that this was the Body of God we ponder on our own frailty and know that "Man, born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries."<sup>1</sup> We remember the chambers of earth in which our loved ones are housed and know that our own frame shall soon return to the dust of which it is composed.

But we cannot stop at Good Friday for to the Christian it is meaningless without Easter. The holy women who sought a body embalmed with spices and the tears of a Virgin Mother sought it in vain. He Whom they sought they adored again but His Body had been transformed. Some of them had been present when Jesus bid Lazarus come forth from the grave but the body of Lazarus after it had been touched by death was not the same as that of Jesus after His had been touched by death. Through the centuries God has permitted other people to be raised from the dead but they lived again in the bodies they had quitted. It is not death that causes the transformation, it is resurrection without the possibility of future death.

A man dies. His soul eventually passes from its particular

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<sup>1</sup> *Job* xiv, 1.

judgment to heaven or hell. The corpse, insensible to pain or pleasure is sealed in the earth. Is the story finished? As reasoning beings we expect that it is not. As human beings we are composed of a body and a soul and reward or punishment is due to our nature, not solely to one essential part of it. We are accustomed to say: "I have sinned," "I have persevered." We do not say: "My soul sinned," "My soul persevered." Justice must be done to us, to our bodies as well as to our souls. But no one can say that justice is done to us in this life. The God-fearing, God-loving people who are suffering acutely from adversity even now are convinced that they deserve better of a Provident God. On the other hand, "the wicked live, and are comforted and set up in riches."<sup>2</sup> In the history of the world it has ever been so and we may therefore rationally look forward to a period of recompense in eternity and justly expect that our bodies will share in the joy or sorrow due us.<sup>3</sup>

A philosopher might think of other reasons for expecting that our bodies will rise again and some have discovered principles that make congruous the idea of a resurrected body. Saint Thomas says that it is against nature for the soul to be separated from the body and since nothing against nature can be lasting, he reasons that at some time the body will be reunited to the soul.<sup>4</sup> We must remember, however, that while we can speculate on the reasonableness of the doctrine, the doctrine itself remains a matter of faith. We may know the reasonableness of the fact, the fact must be believed. The three creeds commonly professed by Christians explicitly set forth the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. In the Athanasian Creed prescribed for the Divine Office we find: "All men shall rise again with their bodies." The priest at Mass recites the Nicene Creed in which he declares: "I expect the resurrection of the dead." The creed that is best known, the Apostle's Creed, repeats: "I believe in the resurrection of the body."

The inspired books of sacred Scripture are not wanting in sources for the strengthening of our belief in this doctrine which reason approves as credible. In reading both the Old and the New Testament we discover that the terms "resurrection of the body" and "resurrection of the dead" are used synonymously. Our belief that our bodies will be restored to us is based on the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ Who was a true man as well as true God.

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<sup>2</sup> *Job* xxi, 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Contra Gentiles* IV, 79.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

It might be argued that He was like to us in all save sin and since death is the decreed punishment for sin, His resurrection was unique. On the other hand, if the merits accruing to us from His Redemption do not wipe out all the effects of sin at any time, then Satan has triumphed in some regard at least. God did decree death as the punishment for sin but the Incarnate God tells us in Scripture that those who believe and hope in Him shall not taste death forever. Centuries before the Incarnation God declared His intention through the prophet Osee. "I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be thy death; O hell, I will be thy bite."<sup>5</sup> Satan can triumph in many things for awhile, in nothing eternally. Saint Jerome, the great Scripture scholar, goes so far as to say: "No man has written of it [the dogma of the Resurrection] more clearly or more certainly; no one as openly after Christ as Job did before Him."<sup>6</sup> No one interested in the doctrine of the resurrection can afford to overlook the words of Job. "I know my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth, and I shall be clothed again with my skin and in my flesh I shall see my God."<sup>7</sup> The New Testament, especially in Saint John and Saint Paul, has many texts that are explicit in their teaching of this doctrine.

In considering any doctrine of the Catholic Church her tradition and practice is often a potent font of enlightenment. The Church itself is a visible, corporal society according to the intention of Christ—"As Thou hast sent Me into the world, I have also sent them into the world."<sup>8</sup> The Incarnate God commissioned it so for He was sent corporally and visibly to be with men. The Church has always claimed and exercised jurisdiction over the bodies of the faithful even though she is primarily concerned with their souls. It is frequently charged against her even in our day that she is so greatly enamored of the souls of men that she has little respect for their bodies. Manichaeism, which says that matter is essentially evil, was condemned by her. A little reflection will convince most of us that since the Church believes and teaches that our bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost in this world and are to be resurrected on the last day she exercises a tender solicitude for them in this life.

The greatest good that the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ can lavish on her children is distributed to them through the

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<sup>5</sup> Osee xiii, 14.

<sup>6</sup> I Ep. 53, 8 *Migne's Patrology* Vol. 22, p. 540, sec. 276.

<sup>7</sup> Job xix, 25, 26.

<sup>8</sup> John xvii, 18.

Sacraments. When a child is presented to her minister for Baptism, in the essential part of the rite, he says: "Ego te baptizo"—"I baptize thee"—not "I baptize your soul." He pours water on the child's head and places salt in its mouth and all this is in conformity with the teaching of the Church for she claims to make of this infant a child of God and an heir of Heaven. When a priest witnesses the marriage of two people he declares them joined into one flesh, not one soul; and the corporal union is blessed. Likewise in the tribunal of Penance the formula of absolution used by the priest includes the body. "I absolve you." Your body has coöperated in some of these sins even though it is your immortal soul that has suffered death in God's sight for them. Your eyes, your tongue, your ears have been instruments in the sin; but the priest absolves you, a being composed of body and soul, and bids you go in peace.

Even when the soul of a Catholic is about to quit his body the Church is mindful of her duty toward men. Extreme Unction is administered and the ears and eyes and other members are anointed with oil. It is always hoped and the hopes are frequently realized that while the soul is directly aided, the body may also share in the healing power of the Sacrament. In Confirmation oil is used on the head as in Holy Orders is it used on the hands. We do not mean to conclude that these two sacraments do not leave a character on the soul, but merely to note that the body is dignified by the ceremony.

Perhaps the dignity of our bodies is most clearly manifested in a consideration of the great Sacrament of God's Love. To worthily receive the Bread of Life we must be in the state of grace—our souls must be free from mortal sin—but the Church also commands that our bodies shall abstain from food or drink from the midnight preceding our reception of the Eucharist. This is an entirely corporal matter although directed to the Sacrament. Here again the words of the priest in administering the Sacrament are significant for in the Roman rite at the ordination of a priest and in the Dominican rite at all times the word "te"—"you" is used. What a great respect Jesus must have had for our bodies when He chose to remain among us all days under the species of bread! Bread is a commodity common to all men. Jesus of Bethlehem chose that commodity to be the matter of this most august Sacrament; and while the words of consecration convert the innermost being of bread, its substance, into the mystical Bread of Heaven, Christ's Body, which is ordained to the nourishment of men's souls, Our Savior gives the species of bread which remain the power to nourish their bodies. We have His promise to

those who eat the Bread of Heaven that He will "raise them up on the last day."<sup>9</sup> Indeed Saint Irenaeus wondered that it could be otherwise. "How can it be asserted that the flesh which is nourished with the Body and Blood of our Lord shall not partake of the life?"<sup>10</sup>

Scripture enuntiates, reason approves and the tradition and practice of the Church bear witness to her belief in the resurrection of our bodies. It is explicitly taught by her as an article of Faith and her doctrine is set forth most concisely in the words of the Fourth Council of the Lateran. "All men shall rise again with their own bodies, which they now have, to receive according to their deeds, whether good or bad: the latter, everlasting punishment with the devil, the former, eternal glory with the Lord."<sup>11</sup> Surely there is no room for any speculation as to who will rise. Very clearly the Church declares "all men" are to be clothed again with their flesh and it is certainly to be expected, for even though Christ's glorious Resurrection is recorded in the Scriptures, it is well to remember that His Body never corrupted and His resurrection was necessarily a glorious one while ours will know no such necessity.

Theologians have discussed what we are to understand by the words "their own bodies" but there is nothing subtle in the expression. The Church uses the words in their obvious sense and as we commonly understand them. On the last day the very bodies which we now have will be restored to us endowed with immortality. Saint Thomas clearly argues that if the soul was not joined to the same body it now informs we would not have a resurrection but the assumption of a new body.<sup>12</sup> The body that we now possess until we die will be restored to us on the last day for all eternity. What happiness for the just to possess a glorified body with the elect in Heaven for ever and ever and what a tremendous curse for the damned. Now, only their souls are tormented in hell but after the general judgment even their bodies shall be tortured. They "shall seek death, and shall not find it, shall desire to die and death shall fly from them."<sup>13</sup>

It is the common teaching of theologians that the bodies of the just, their glorified bodies will possess four qualities, namely: impassibility, clarity, agility and subtilty as did the Body of the Tri-

<sup>9</sup> *John* vi, 40.

<sup>10</sup> *Adv. Haeres. lib* IV, 18; *Migne's Patrology* Tome VII, col. 1028.

<sup>11</sup> *Denziger-Bannwart* 429.

<sup>12</sup> *Summa Theol.* Supplem. q. 79, a. 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Apoc.* ix, 6.

umphant Savior. Even in this life the moving power of the body is derived from the soul for a body within a soul is impotent, a corpse. On earth, however, there is frequently a conflict between the body and the soul which even the saints have experienced. Saint Paul very plainly admitted his own struggle when he wrote: "I see another law in my members fighting against the law of my mind." "For the good which I will, I do not: but this evil which I will not, that I do."<sup>14</sup> In eternity our immortal bodies will not be capable of any such struggle for they will be perfectly, completely subject to the soul. Because of this perfect subjection to the soul, the body will be able to suffer no pain nor sorrow and so we say it will be impassible. Because all the organic actions of the body will serve the soul it will be subtle, and because all the locomotive action of the body will be under the guidance of the soul we say that it will be agile. Even the external beauty of the body will be enhanced by the soul and this disposition is known as clarity. The bodies of the damned will be incorruptible but not impassible. Of course it is difficult for our finite minds to understand how a body could burn eternally and not be consumed but there is no greater difficulty in that regard than there is in understanding how God created man, the king of His creation, from the slime of the earth. The Omnipotence of God is not to be gauged by a finite mind.

While we claimed that there was no other than the common interpretation to be given to the words of the Lateran Council, "their own bodies" rather, just because they are to be understood in their usual signification many speculative questions may be proposed. Medical men contend that the human body undergoes a complete change every seven years so that a man of twenty-eight has not the same body that he had at fourteen. Theologians maintain that despite this a man has one and the same body numerically at forty as he had at fourteen or four. From day to day our bodies undergo changes so that there is no absolute identity in our bodies on earth although they are numerically one and that suffices for the doctrine of Saint Thomas. If, after an accident, large quantities of skin are grafted on a man we do not say that his body has been changed for another. "What does not bar numerical unity in a man while he lives on interruptedly clearly can be no bar to the identity of the risen man with the man that was."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Rom.* vii, 23; 19.

<sup>15</sup> *Contra Gentiles* IV, 81, 4.

Greater difficulties may appear concerning the integrity of the body. The horrors of war are known to us and it is common knowledge that the bodies of many men were torn to shreds. Many others have been burnt so badly that not even their bones could be collected. Must we imagine that their bodies will be reassembled on the last day? Some infants have lived in this world only long enough to receive the waters of baptism on their pitifully deformed bodies. Other people have lived so long as to have had their bodies wasted by old age. Some have been deprived of the use of some of their senses since birth while others have suffered the loss of arms or limbs. What is heaven to be like? We can only venture conjectures but we do know from Scripture that all the works of God are perfect and since the resurrection of the body can only be accomplished by the divine Omnipotence we can conclude that the risen body will be perfect in all its members.<sup>16</sup> Most theologians even conjecture that all bodies will appear as in their prime for they argue that the bodies will have their maximum perfection and since bodies in this world seem to have their maximum perfection in their prime they conjecture that in heaven the same will be true. They even speak of a particular age. Saint Paul exhorted the Ephesians to be faithful "until we all meet unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ."<sup>17</sup> Christ, as we know, rose around the age of thirty-three and we are free to think that an approximation of that will be the age of the bodies after their resurrection."<sup>18</sup> All the organs that pertain to the integrity of the body will be restored but all of them will not exercise their functions. We will have no need for food to nourish our bodies and no new creatures will be propagated. "In the resurrection they shall neither marry nor be married."<sup>19</sup> We shall surely see the glorified Body of our Redeemer and that of our Blessed Lady as well as all the other glorified bodies and shall hear the paeans of praise and exultation that arise continually before the throne of God. One is free to speculate concerning such matters since nothing of faith is defined regarding them. Just as Adam's body came forth perfect under the breath of God, so shall the bodies of all men come forth perfect on the last day because of Christ's Resurrection. The bodies which they had in this world shall

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<sup>16</sup> *Summa Theol. Supplem.* q. 80 vel. 82 a. 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ephes.* iv, 13.

<sup>18</sup> *Summa Theol. Supplem.* q. 81 vel. 83 a. 1. Sed Contra.

<sup>19</sup> *Matt.* xxii, 30.

be restored to them purged of all imperfections, whole and entire and endowed with immortality.

The doctrine of the resurrection is one of the most important and one of the most beautiful in the deposit of the Catholic Faith. Surely no one can truthfully say that the Church is too engrossed with the souls of her members as to be absolutely forgetful of their bodies. She has a tremendous respect for them in this life as temples of the Holy Ghost and she believes that in the next they are to partake in the glory of heaven or the torture of hell. She would have us respect them now that they may be glorified hereafter, not by pampering them or being unduly concerned about their physical welfare, but by urging us to keep them under the domination of our souls in so far as it is possible in this life. It is true that she reminds us always that we are but dust; she urges us to remember that we are of the slime of the earth but she does not stop at that. She stands above the wintry bleakness of a grave and commits our bodies to it but she bids us wait patiently in our long sleep for the springtime of the Great Day. Centuries ago in Judea the Angel Gabriel announced to a Virgin that God was to assume human nature, a body: God was to dwell among us. The Church would have us live and die with the expectation that at some future time another angelic communication will announce that our bodies are to live again forever; to dwell with God. May this dust of ours be glorified.