

12th Sunday (A)

21st June 2026

'Body & Soul; Death & Life'

Jer 20: *He has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of the evildoers ...* Ps 68 (69): *It is for You that I suffer taunts ...* Rom 5 *sin came in to the world through one man ...* Mt 10:26–33: *do not be fear those who kill the body ...*

They are striking words, aren't they, from Jesus, today?

Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

What do we understand by body and soul? — they are terms that as Christians we bandy about very readily, ... and rightly so; this dual dimension of mankind's nature is important to express. It's important to get it right.

Body: the material aspect of our being, whose nature we share with stars and trees and animals: our physical make-up ... evolved, as is clear, over the billions of years of the universe's existence, through cosmological evolution, geological evolution, and biological evolution from lower life-forms. I went, yesterday, to the Grant Museum of Zoology almost next door (never been in 5yrs!). It is fascinating to see the multitude of forms of the animals, both pre-historic and contemporary — and to see how our

human bodily make-up connects with, and differs from, our biological ancestors in the Tree of Life.

Soul: the spiritual aspect of our being, that we share with nothing else in the material universe: we share a spiritual nature only with the angels and God Himself. (Note, for example, that Jesus was made *man*, not star, tree or animal. None of those would have made sense, for none of those are spiritual — none of those will enjoy heaven.) Naturally the soul is invisible, it has no material part; no dissection will ever reveal in the innermost recesses of our physiology direct physical evidence for the soul. But there is *indirect* physical evidence, for example in the size of the brain, way larger in proportion to our body size than would be needed for merely physical existence like any other animal; we need this very large brain because we approach life on a plane that is vastly more than just bodily. The human brain is the most complex thing in the universe! — I mean that: 86 billion neurons; 85 billion other cells, and 100 trillion synaptic connections. This physical substrate, the human body, goes to support our spiritual life, our soul.

Now, the body is — in this life — mortal and subject to decay and death; but our soul is immortal, and can in fact live beyond death, even separate from its body, in heaven or hell, as our earthly life determines. But at the end of time, at the Last Judgment, our souls will be re-united with a body: in heaven that will mean a glorified, risen body, like the Risen Jesus has; in hell, there will also be a reunion of body & soul, though in less happy circumstances. Humanly we are *made* to have our body united to our soul; the body–soul composite, or union, is what makes us human: matter *and* spirit, meaning we are the confluence of two realms of God’s world.

The Christian faith and the Gospel teach us about the body and the soul: not that the body is bad; not that the soul should flee the body; not that we should neglect the body ... these were all heresies denounced in the early Church, Gnostic, Manichaeian, and pagan-influenced theologies, that despised the flesh, denounced the body, and denigrated our physical, bodily and sexual life. But certainly it also teaches that there is a *priority* of the soul

over the body: a primacy of spirit over matter. This is because the body must be controlled by the spirit; the sinful desires that sometimes overpower our holiness can come from the body — greed, or laziness, or lust — and these should be countered by the good intentions of the spirit. Think of it: our soul is the sacred flame which is made in the image of God’s own Almighty spirit. No animals, only the angels, have a spirit like our own — a spirit made to dwell in heaven with God for all eternity ... and this is supreme happiness. We must do all that we can to preserve our holiness of spirit. We must avoid with our whole will anything which we know can taint our soul. The more purely we have aligned our soul to Christ’s in this life, the happier we shall be in the next. Never forget the sacredness that you are — the sacredness of any and every human life — because every human life is made by God to be a temple of the Holy Spirit, a soul aflame with spiritual grace, and not deprived and starved of it. The more the soul is full of grace, the more pleasing we are to God, the more beautiful, and indeed the more happy.

Never for one moment threaten that. It is because He loves us and desperately wants us to be in perfect union with Him that Jesus cautions us in such terms: *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul; fear Him, rather, who can destroy both body and soul in hell.*

The Second Reading, from Romans 5, also sheds light on this matter, as it's the text that is oft-quoted in connection with original sin.

Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned ...

Our first parents' sinning — their exercise of pride and disobedience to God's clear instruction — led them to a loss of Eden, the earthly paradise. It led, too, to an increase in gravely negative bodily consequences: in their relationship to the earth (their laboriously tilling the soil and gathering-in their food); in relationship to one another, tensions, jealousies and killings ensue; and indeed also in their bodily destiny, as whatever God would have intended had we not sinned, by way of a painless transition to the eternal life — our dormition and assumption — was no

longer fitting; we had lost those divine privileges for now. This is the disaster of original sin: that the free will which is a crucial and precious dimension of our spiritual make-up, our soul, when exercised in contradiction with our human nature, wreaks havoc both morally and indeed bodily: *through sin came death.*

One might object that bodily death is part and parcel of terrestrial biological history: organisms die, don't they, and species even become extinct? — this interplay between death and the biological / reproductive 'survival of the fittest' is the very basis for the evolutionary mechanism and the wonderful blossoming of life in all its many forms and ecological niches. So, surely, death is a normal and God-given part of that — it's the way of the natural world as God made it, long before human original sin?

True, ... but maybe not so true in the case of humanity because of our being the pinnacle of creation. The human Original Sin at the dawn of time did cause the painful experience of bodily death, the severance of our unique composite of body & soul; this is a consequence of

our causing that moral rupture in the fabric of God's good world: that spiritual rebellion has huge, long-term, and physical consequences: we are no longer ready for heaven, most of us, come the end of our earthly pilgrimage; we die, our bodies dissociate and decay, we exist as bodiless souls in the interim, and require the painful purification of purgatory.

This is the situation we find ourselves in, this fallen world. But, as we know, despite the sin, despite concupiscence, despite the ease with which we transgress and fall away from our good intentions ... yet, "*with the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.*" St Paul expresses the great hope that is at the heart of all Christian preaching and teaching:

"For the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded for many."

We have the remedy for sin right here, and the antidote to a sinful self-sufficiency: "*it is the Lord!*" So, just as the martyrs did, so heroically, so courageously, we know that

we need not fear the terrors of the night, we need not fear the plague that prowls in the darkness; we need not fear death at all. We can exercise a trust in the Lord who holds the key to life and death that no-one else holds or could ever hold, and whose whole 13.7bn-year cosmos is a master-plan that will come to fruition in His own time and in His own way, with mercy and faithfulness. Let's bear that fruit that He wants: the fruit of good works that is not paralysed by fears of life, or fears of death, but opens up to the horizon of infinite charity that is God Himself. As so often, the psalms set in exquisite poetry these hopes and fears, that God's is the only answer to human life and brings us peace. Here's a verse from today's psalm:

*"The poor when they see it will be glad,
and God-seeking hearts will revive;
for the Lord listens to the needy,
and does not spurn His servants in their chains.
Let the heavens and the earth give Him praise,
the sea and all its living creatures."*