

people's political struggle; nor her former spouse's marital obligations to her. In the end, even her earthly legacy has nothing to do with the greater reality of the ultimate and triumphant power of God.

Belief in resurrection is the gospel proclamation that death is not the end of Guadalupe. How do I know this? I don't. So I believe it instead. Like the bush ablaze with the eternal mystery of God's eternity, we choose to believe in resurrection, and a "God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all are alive."

Amen. *jb+*

What is his relationship now, he may ask himself, to one with whom he once recited marriage vows for life; those promises that contained within them the escape clause that clearly specified the termination of the nuptial contract: "... until we are parted by death?"

Posing such a question may, on the one hand, appear to be just the opposite of the one put to Jesus by the Sadducees in today's gospel story. In that exaggerated hypothetical at least six out of the seven brothers were presumed to be off the hook when it came to their otherwise-perpetual obligation to the dreaded husband-killer! Whereas, in our little contemporary story, there is only one husband who is still alive; and who somehow feels strangely connected and still responsible to one who now is dead and gone.

The Sadducees' motives, of course, are to trap Jesus in the legalities of the Mosaic Law tradition. The Sadducees were a select group of religious conservatives who were really hung up on the Pentateuch, the so-called five books of Moses and the rules and regulations. They also did not believe in anything as non-specific as resurrection. So when – after concocting the ludicrous story with a hypothetical they don't believe themselves, they ask, "In the resurrection, whose wife will she be?" they betray themselves and their real motives. They're more interested in proving their disbelief, attempting to place Jesus in a self-contradiction. Typically, however, Jesus uses the opportunity instead to deconstruct their human-bound notions of the transcendent notion of resurrection.

First, he tells them, they misunderstand what resurrection is all about. In their wooden thinking they characterize the next life as nothing more than a continuation of this life; and everything in this life, including human made relationships, such as marriage in any form.

Jesus then goes back to what would have been a scriptural point of reference for them, and engages them on familiar turf. He refers to the One who spoke to Moses in the burning bush; a bush that was not consumed and reduced to dust and ashes. The deeper point, beyond whatever the voice said, suggests in this story we've moved beyond merely the physical realm of God's greater reality.

Jesus quotes what must have been some of their favorite lines: "I am." "I am the God of Abraham." "I am the God of Isaac." "I am the God of Jacob." Abraham, Isaac and Jacob died in their own good time. And all are still alive in the Lord. As one commentator put it succinctly, Jesus essentially instructs us, when it comes to the notion of resurrection, "*our* end is not *the* end."

God only spoke out of a blazing bush once. It was enough. It is enough to always and ultimately remind us the gospel of Christ is about resurrection. It is about resurrection, if it is about anything at all. It certainly is not about what constitutes the parameters or limitations of human relationships; let alone something as ubiquitous – in our own contemporary world – as "moral values" or "traditional marriage."

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How do I know this? Just remember our Mexican brother, the widower, from the little town of San Jose Estancia Grande. The tragic end of Guadalupe's life may, or may not, be the end of her

Guadalupe Avila worked to improve the lives of the citizens of her village. Stories are told of her scooting around her village on a yellow bicycle, organizing assistance for the elderly and the young. When people could not afford the prices charged by the local doctor for medical care, she sought a doctor with lower fees. When parents complained their children were not learning to read and write, Guadalupe led a sit-in at the elementary school for two weeks, until the authorities agreed to send new teachers.

“Most people would look at this village and see nothing,” one appreciative citizen said, “but she looked at it and saw big things. She saw big things in us, and she made us see them too. She did more for people than any mayor. But what was good for us, was bad for them, so they killed her.”

Four weeks ago the mayor whom she hoped to defeat in a local election chased her into a public health clinic, and shot her to death in front of a dozen onlookers. The local police reportedly did nothing to keep him from escaping. But three days later, Guadalupe Avila Salinas won the election anyway.

Now, this story sounds like so many others when it comes to the futile struggle of the people against the repressive regime of the few who stop at nothing to fiercely and violently hold onto their power; so many, in fact, that the cynic in me would conclude, once again, no good deed goes unpunished. Yet this time, the people did not submit to the violence. Not only did they posthumously elect Guadalupe to be their mayor, they then proceeded to ask her husband to serve in her place to “keep her dream alive.”

Like many men from poor, rural Mexico, Guadalupe’s husband had left his own country to work in the United States. His earnings not only helped put food on the table, but also helped finance his wife’s election campaign. After she was murdered, he returned home from his construction job in Las Vegas, with the simple hope of quietly burying his wife and scooping up their children to safety. As he puts it now, he never wanted to step into the threatening arena of Mexican politics, and is uncertain what to do at this point.

Interviewed recently in the cemetery where his wife was buried, he talked about the hard decision ahead. On the one hand, he felt pressured to accept the voters’ request by a sense of obligation to his dead spouse, her struggle and her legacy. He fears if he flees back to Las Vegas, everything Guadalupe tried to do may have been in vain, and those responsible for her death will triumph.

At the same time, he reasonably fears he could become the next victim. He worried about the safety of his children. And he understandably questions whether in one 3-year term, he can really make that much tangible difference in system consumed with official corruption.

What makes this story so interesting isn’t merely the struggle of a political reform movement, and one man’s willingness to lay down his life for sake of his neighbor; let alone his responsibility as the sole-surviving parent to his children. It is the conflicting tensions, obligations and devotion he must now sort out in his relationship to his dead spouse. What is his relationship now, he may ask himself, to one with whom he once recited marriage vows for life; those promises that contained within them the escape clause that clearly specified the termination of the nuptial contract: “... until we are parted by death?”

BEATING THE BUSHES: WHEN BELIEVING BEATS KNOWING

A SERMON PREACHED AT SAINT JOHN'S PARISH, NOVEMBER 7, 2004

Appointed gospel text for Pentecost Season XXIII, Year C, Proper 27:

Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; then the second and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. Finally the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her." Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive." Luke 20:27-38

*"Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living;
for in him all are alive."*

Well the presidential election is over. Thank God. And, some might add, thank the Christian conservative-evangelical voting block. As one believer put it on a sign he was captured in a photo, which read: "God has spoken again from of a *Bush* ..."

It would be helpful, however, for our friend to remember the biblical bush was ablaze, but not consumed. Whereas presidential winners and losers — indeed all earthly relationships — will go the way of all flesh. And in its own way, the peculiar manifestation of the divine speaking out of a physical contradiction is a reminder that life, death, and resurrection are less a matter of knowing or tangible certitude, and more a matter of mystifying belief.

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Now a story.

In the little town of San José Estancia Grande, Mexico, lived Guadalupe Ávila Salinas, a mother of four, a beloved community worker, and a candidate for mayor of this poor rural town of eight hundred residents.

Remember our neighbors, who live just south of our own nation's border, have only been enjoying open presidential elections for only a short time now; preceded by a long history of brutal authoritarian rule, through the means of intimidation & assassination.