

Mortal Body, Spiritual Body

St. Monica, upon coming to the end of her life, was stuck in Italy where she had been pursuing her son, Augustine, in hopes of bringing him to the Faith. Alarmed at her failing condition, Augustine assured her that he would bury her in her own country, across the sea in Roman North Africa. The essence of Monica's response to this reassurance was to tell her son not to give it another thought and to plant her body wherever was most convenient.

As a devout Christian, Monica believed in the Resurrection of the Body. Her remarks don't indicate a disdain for her body or her homeland. Instead, her attitude reflects that which is found in the New Testament: *"Here we have no lasting city."*, (Hebrews 13:14). *"For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."* (1 Corinthians 15:52). By faith, Monica knew that God would know exactly where her body lay and reunite it with her immortal soul on the Day of Resurrection.

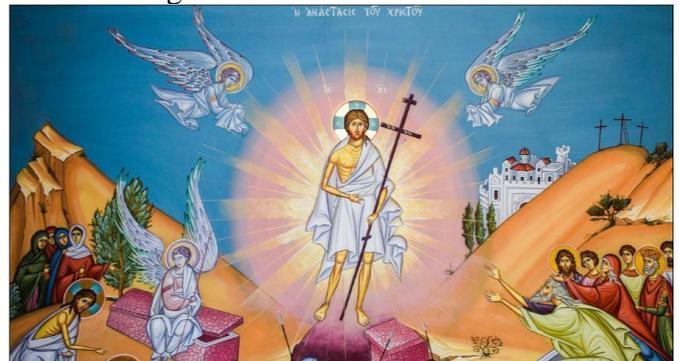
But, of course, this belief is severely challenged by the decay of the body into nothing but bones and dust. And, it is challenged all the more so if a body has disintegrated and been scattered by some calamitous event. This, however, does not take into account the intimate relationship of body and soul. We tend to think of our soul as a "ghost" version of ourselves which walks in lockstep with our bodies. And then, when we die, we become ghosts: We look like ourselves but with transparent bodies.

The truth of the matter is that our soul is just our essence abstracted or disconnected from matter. My essence is who and what I am: It is particular in the sense that it is uniquely me. It is universal in the sense that it is a human soul like every other human soul. But, the mortal body I have at the moment, (the one typing these words), is a collection of ordinary matter of this world enformed by the soul of this particular Gregory.

It is impossible to imagine what reality will be like as a soul disconnected from the body. As I write and as you read, our deceased friends and relatives are experiencing this. But, as we read in scripture, ***"No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him."*** (1Cor. 2:9) We only have

images with which to work our imaginations: light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the kingdom, the Father's house, (CCC #1027)

Einstein discovered that matter and energy are convertible. This has only been proven in one direction inside of nuclear reactors and atomic bombs: Therein matter was converted into massive amounts of energy by the splitting of atoms. Theoretically it is possible to turn energy into matter but the energy requirements are, apparently, massive. The discovery of this physical reality stands there as an analogy to this revelation of the Resurrection which is our hope: Flesh is convertible with Spirit, in some sense. The Risen Jesus emerged from the tomb with a genuinely, physical body. But it was a body somehow, strangely transformed: He is free from the strictures of time and space. He seemingly appears from out of nowhere. He is not immediately recognized. Yet, he is suddenly and fully recognized by an utterance or gesture.



In *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week*, Pope Benedict XVI says the following of the Gospel testimonies of the Risen Lord: *"In the internal contradictions characteristic of all the accounts of what the disciples experienced, in the mysterious combination of otherness and identity, we see reflected a new form of encounter, one that from an apologetic standpoint may seem rather awkward but that is all the more credible as a record of the experience."* In other words, it is precisely in the vagaries of the various Resurrection appearances recorded in the New Testament that the Pope sees greater credibility. Mere humans are trying to describe what is indescribable and miraculous.

Again, it is the intimate relationship between the physical body and the immaterial soul which demands the reunion which is resurrection. And so our Lord deigned to reveal this to us in His own earthly body.