

WHY BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION (Part 1)

Nancy Lohman sells real estate – kind of. To be precise, she sells \$400,000 mausoleums at any one of a number of the several dozen Florida cemeteries she owns. Quoted in the *New York Times*, she said of her “product,” “The mausoleum says, ‘I’m really significant in this world, I think I’m really significant to my family,’ and this is one way to communicate that to the community.” One of her customers, Ed Peck, said his reason for purchasing his white granite tomb in a Greek-pillared neo-classical style was that “I did not want to be in the ground covered with weeds and whatnot and totally forgotten; I don’t like the idea of dirt being dumped on me.” At the time, the newspaper reported, there was a growing popularity for extravagant tombs costing anywhere from a quarter million dollars to a million dollars (“For a price, Final Resting Places That Even Tut Could Appreciate,” *The New York Times*, April 17, 2006). Nowadays, the trend is in the opposite direction: cremation without internment in a sacred place and often without any thought of funeral rites. Recently, I learned of a couple who moved into their new home and found an urn with the cremated remains of someone left behind by the previous owners.

I wonder if this doesn’t suggest a problem of faith in the Resurrection. If it’s true that we live in a post-Christian era, then the elemental teaching of the Church, that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, has little bearing on people’s lives. I can’t imagine there are many who think there is no existence after we die; it’s only the most hardened hearts that can conceive of “nothing” beyond this life. After all, God places an imperishable spirit within us (Wisdom

12:1) - but to believe in the Resurrection, both Jesus’ and ours, is an article of faith particular to Christians. We measure our “significance in the world” by the ransom God paid for us in giving his only begotten son. The Resurrection is proof-positive that God loves humanity. Our destiny is hardly in the ground, covered “with weeds and whatnot” but neither is the “temple of the Holy Spirit” - our body - irrelevant. The Resurrection is the beginning of the re-creation of the world God intended from the beginning, without sin and its consequence, death. No matter how glorious the monuments we leave behind to our memories, or how much we neglect our corporality, we will – in truth - be forgotten when those who love us depart themselves from this life; but we will never be forgotten by God!

St. Augustine wrote: “Costly funerals and expensive displays may afford the living some consolation but are of no benefit to the departed.... Let care be bestowed upon funerals and the erection of monuments.... Let all perform these last services for their departed, and thereby relieve their own sorrow; but let them show greater zeal, care, and generosity in succoring the souls of the departed by Masses, prayers, and alms, and thus give evidence not only of a temporal, but also a spiritual love for those who are departed in body only, but not in spirit.”

We should not be surprised when formerly Christian societies take up practices and follow trends that are typical of non-Christian cultures. When there is no faith, something must take its place; nature, it is said, abhors a vacuum. How sad, however, that the Gospel message that Christ has risen from the dead has failed to fascinate and captivate so many people with what is the only reasonable answer to our desire to enjoy the loves and blessings of this life forever.