

Can you Explain the Resurrection of the Body?

The Bible tells us that when Jesus returns to earth, he will physically raise all those who have died, giving them back the bodies they lost at death. These will be the same bodies people had in earthly life—but our resurrection bodies will not die and, for the righteous, they will be transformed into a glorified state, freed from suffering and pain, and enabled to do many of the amazing things Jesus could do with his glorified body (cf. 1 Corinthians. 15:35–44, 1 John 3:2). St. Paul insists that because Christ our Head rose, those who are members of Him must also rise. So, to deny the general resurrection would imply a denial of Christ's resurrection (1 Cor 15:13).

After the resurrection, each person will have the same body (except for imperfections) that he had in this life. If this involves having the same matter, this is surely within God's power. No matter what happens to the body after death, He can recall and rebuild the material of the body. In fact, we now know that because of metabolism--in which every cell is constantly being torn down and rebuilt--in a normal life span a person has the material for many bodies. We will, of course be the same persons after the resurrection as we were before death.

The resurrection of the body is an essential Christian doctrine, as the apostle Paul declares: “If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (1 Cor. 15:13–18).

Because, as Paul tells us, the Christian faith cannot exist without this doctrine, it has been infallibly defined by the Church. It is included in the three infallible professions of faith—the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed—and has been solemnly, infallibly taught by ecumenical councils.

Most recently, the Catechism of the Catholic Church reiterated this long-defined teaching, stating, “We believe in the true resurrection of this flesh that we now possess’ (Council of Lyons II). We sow a corruptible body in the tomb, but he raises up an incorruptible body, a ‘spiritual body’ (cf. 1 Cor 15:42–44)” (CCC 1017).

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