

Readings: 1 Samuel 26: 2, 7 – 9, 12 – 13, 22 – 23; Psalm 102 (103): 1 – 4, 8, 10, 12 – 13;
1 Corinthians 15: 45 – 49; Luke 6: 27 – 38.

The New Testament Reading for today continues the passage we have been hearing for the last two weeks. Paul has shown that the resurrection of Jesus is fundamental to Christian faith and that it is the justification for the belief which we profess Sunday by Sunday in the Creed – *the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come*. The lectionary has skipped over Paul's exposition of the way in which Christians will share in the resurrection – that is in a *spiritual body* rather than the *natural body* which we share with all other human beings.

This leads Paul to think of the creation story in Genesis, which implies the unity of all human beings – female as well as male – in *the first man, Adam*. Genesis says that *the LORD God formed man (adam) of dust from the ground (adamah) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul*. There was a widespread belief among Jews and Gentiles that, in addition to this 'man of earth', another man existed – an eternal 'heavenly man'. Paul identifies this man with the risen Jesus, *the last Adam*. He is not merely *a living soul*, but, through his resurrection, *he has become a life-giving spirit*, able to share his risen life with others.

So, Paul goes on to argue that Christians, who like all human beings share in the earthy nature of the First Adam, will, at the Resurrection, share in the heavenly nature of the Last Adam.

This can happen, not because human beings are by nature bound for a life in heaven – Paul will go on to say that *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God* – but through the transforming power of the Risen Christ.

In one of his earlier letters (1 Thessalonians) Paul has given a picture of the end of time when *the dead in Christ will rise first*, and then *those who are still alive will be caught up with them...to meet the Lord...and so we shall always be with the Lord*. Only then will the Resurrection of Christ have completed its work.

In the meanwhile Paul describes the Christian dead as *those who have fallen asleep* – which is why Christian burial places are called cemeteries – from the Greek word for a dormitory. Until the Last Day, when all are changed, receiving their spiritual bodies from the life-giving Lord, Christians pray that the departed may sleep in peace.