

21 Fifth Sunday of Lent Year A March 29, 2020
Ezekiel 37:12-14 Psalm 130 Romans 8:8-11 John 11:1-45

The Gospel story presents us with a scene which is all too familiar to us, people weeping over the death of a loved one. Many of us in our community who have stood at the grave of parents or loved ones or friends know all too well the pain and the hurt Martha and Mary must have felt at the loss of their brother. Of all the causes of tears, death is the greatest.

In today's Gospel Jesus *weeps* when He learns of the death of His good friend Lazarus, whom He loves like a brother. The tears of Jesus serve as a lasting reminder that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. Though He has the power to walk on water and raise the dead, He is also capable of feeling death, pain and grief, just as we do.

Martha confronts Jesus saying, "*Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.*" Martha is not just speaking from her grief. She also makes a profession of faith, "*Even now, I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give it to You.*" As upset as Martha may be about both her brother's death and Jesus' absence, she believes there is still reason to hope.

Jesus boldly states, "*I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in Me, even if he dies, will live.*" Jesus then asks Martha, "*Do you believe this?*" The answer to this question defines the life and the faith of every believer. It is the same question asked of each of us when we confront our own mortality or the death of someone we love. Our faith is rooted in the central truth of Christ's resurrection. Soon to face His own passion, Jesus has come to Bethany to show Martha that life does not end in death.

Jesus Himself promises Martha: "*Your brother will rise again.*" Martha, in turn, professes her faith in the resurrection of Lazarus on the *last day*. But Jesus leads Martha beyond an acceptance in the hope of life after death to the reality of Himself as the source of Lazarus' new life.

Like Martha, we sometimes push God's power so far into the future that we cannot acknowledge His power at work in us *here and now*. In spite of Martha's doubts, Jesus proceeds to raise Lazarus. The raising of Lazarus points out that the life we are searching for is not an extension of physical life but eternal life with God. Jesus gives us

life *now* through Baptism and a life of faith just as clearly as He has raised Lazarus from the tomb. The liturgy understands the story of Lazarus in this Sunday's Gospel as symbolic of Baptism.

In Baptism we begin a journey where we too will die, but where we will also rise, body and soul, to eternal life at the Last Judgment. In St. Paul's letter to the Romans, he describes how this life is possible: "When we die with Christ in Baptism, we also rise with Him" (6:8). In today's Second Reading, St. Paul writes, "If the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through His Spirit which dwells in you."

In truth, the life we share with God is not something which begins after death. It begins on the day of our Baptism when the seed of God's life is planted in us for the first time. At that moment, we become children of God and heirs to the kingdom of God. We are given the grace to start seeing as Jesus sees, to love as He loves and to follow Him to His Father.

Oftentimes the life we receive at Baptism weakens and we become dead to the voice of Christ calling us to Himself and wanting to make His home in us. Unfortunately, many people's troubles may come from being caught up in the ways of the world and becoming so enticed by its passing pleasures that they refuse to come out of their worldly tombs and be free.

For others, what holds them in their worldly tomb is selfishness, clinging to past grudges, anger, not being able to forgive someone, past hurtful memories, addictions, and pride, to name a few. We are called to answer God's invitation to come out of our worldly tomb and live in His grace.

Now the question is, *Are there things in our lives that are like in being in a tomb, keeping us from fully living our faith? Are we making a sincere effort to keep Jesus foremost in our hearts? Do our actions testify to our beliefs as Catholics? Or are they done for the acceptance and praise of others?*

Jesus calls us to invite Him into our daily life so that we may experience the fullness of life the Father wants for us. This Lenten Season is an ideal time to quietly contemplate how we are worshiping God, how much we recognize the love and care God has for each of us.

How does St. John's Gospel passage affect our lives today? While the promise of resurrection for our souls is so wonderful for each of us, we know all too well that it will occur only when we die or at the end of time. We cannot live a resurrected life unless we are living a life of hope in today's world *now*. We cannot expect to be raised to new life, unless we are able to die to ourselves today. We are called to answer God's invitation to come out of our tomb of the bondage of sin and live in God's grace.

All these thoughts on life and death can be rather frightening at times. No one ever said that death will be easy. Yet, we are told throughout Scripture that we must prepare ourselves for the time when God will call us to Himself. It is our faith that Jesus is *the Resurrection and the Life* which allows us to prepare for this time with confidence.

We believe in our God who loves us unconditionally and who judges us not only with justice, but with His mercy as well. For us, our earthly life may be important but when we die, the life we enter is even more important. It is this hope of eternal life with God on which we base our faith and our trust.

As we live the life of Jesus, *the Resurrection and the Life*, may we be open to living lives of hope. Through our faith in Christ, and Baptism into Him, each of us is *not in the flesh* but, rather, *we are in the spirit*.

There are only two weeks left before we celebrate Easter Sunday. The climax of the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday will be the renewal of our Baptismal promises around the Pascal candle of our Risen Lord. This renewal should be a conscious, deliberate yes to Christ who died and rose to life. When we say yes to the Resurrection we are also saying yes to the cross and rejecting sin.

As well, make the time to be still and listen to God's Word speaking in your heart. In doing these things, your Easter celebration will become more meaningful and your life, as a whole, will be enriched and blessed.