

LENT 5
Ezek 37:12-14
Rom 8:8-11
Jn 11:3-7;17;20-27;33-45

The Old Testament and gospel readings for today are well known and the second reading provides a link to them. St Paul suggests that we are not alive because we manage to get out of bed in the morning because we possess something called 'life'. We are alive because the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us.

Ezekiel promises his people in exile in Babylon that although they had lost hope and were spiritually dead, God would fill them with his Spirit and lead them home to Jerusalem. If a human life is not directed towards God, that person is existing rather than living. God's creative process is to bring order out of chaos and life out of death. Without God, a culture of chaos and death will reign supreme.

Jesus came so we might have life because he is the Resurrection and the Life. He gives life both in the present and in the future because in him is life and that life is the light of men. The raising, or to be precise, the resuscitation of Lazarus is the seventh and last sign in St John's gospel in which Jesus reveals who he is. When he was told that his friend was sick, Jesus did not rush to his side, but said that his sickness would not end in death. He is saying that through it God would be glorified. The glory that will be visible through Lazarus will be even greater through the death of Jesus.

In Jewish Tradition, the soul of a deceased person hovers over the corpse for three days contemplating a return to the body, but once the facial colour had faded, it goes away never to return (Genesis Rab 50:10). Jesus waited for four days before going to Bethany in full daylight, deliberately walking into the trap that led to his own death.

It is Martha who challenges Jesus for not coming sooner. Jesus assures her that Lazarus will share in the general resurrection on the last day. She believes this but it doesn't lessen her grief. Jesus says that those who live in faith, trusting in God and being open to him in their lives are not exempt from the death of their physical body, but a life filled with God's Spirit is more than that. For the faithful life is changed, not taken away when the body dies. Living a life that is open to God and his will is eternal life. We can live that life in the here and now.

When Jesus asked Martha if she believed this, she responded by making a statement of faith. She said, "I believe that you are the Messiah." Jesus then shows her that he is indeed the Lord of Life and Death by going to Lazarus' tomb and calling him back to life. The witnesses to Lazarus' resuscitation responded in different ways. Some believed in Jesus, others reported the event to the Pharisees who increased their efforts to end what they saw was a threat to their Jewish faith.

We are moving closer to Jesus' final days and because of the current situation we will not be able to walk alongside Jesus in the way we normally do. Even so, we need to observe the final three days of Holy Week as best we can, above all witnessing the Passion of Christ through the eyes of faith continuing to gaze at him. Those who turn away from him to look

at other things do not have life in them. Those who gaze upon the Lord and wait on him will have eternal life both now and for eternity. Will your funeral be a celebration of your past life that mistakenly envisages no future or will be it a celebration of life that is changed but not taken away?

On a tombstone were written the words, "Here lies the body of atheist Joe, All dressed up with nowhere to go." Scrawled underneath were the words, "I bet he wishes that it was so,"

Msgr Harry Entwistle
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