

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent (Passion Sunday)

Ezek 37:12-14

Rom 8:8-11

Jn 11:3-7; 17;20-27;33-45

St Paul's passage from Romans provides a link between today's Old Testament and Gospel readings. St Paul is suggesting that we are not alive just because we manage to crawl out of bed in the morning, we are alive because we are filled with the Spirit of God.

Ezekiel promises the Jews in exile in Babylon that although they had lost hope and were spiritually dead, God would fill them with His Spirit and lead them back home to Jerusalem. Human life that is not directed towards God is only an existence. 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.

In the last few weeks we have encountered Jesus as the Living water and the Light of the World, and today we encounter Him as the Resurrection and the Life. He gives life both in the present and the future because His life is the light of men (Jn 1:4). The resuscitation of Lazarus is the 7<sup>th</sup> and last sign in St John's Gospel that reveals who Jesus is. When He was told that His friend Lazarus was sick, He did not rush to his side but said that his sickness would not end in death. He said that through Lazarus' sickness God would be glorified. The glory that was visible through his resuscitation 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 but once the facial colour has faded, it goes away never to return. Jesus deliberately waited until three days had passed before going to Bethany during daylight, knowing He was walking into the trap that would lead to his own death.

Martha challenges Jesus about His not coming sooner to save her brother although she acknowledges that he will rise again on the Last Day. Even so, that didn't lessen her sense of loss. 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 the 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 and we can live that life here on earth now.

When Jesus asked Martha if she believed this, she responded by acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus then proves to her that He is the Lord of Life and Death by going to Lazarus' tomb and calling him back to life. Lazarus comes out of the tomb still bound in his bandages. Jesus tells the people to unbind him, let him go free. The Greek word for 'let go' used here is used for releasing prisoners, slaves or starting a horse race. It is a happy occasion and this is what God does to sinners which the word 'forgiveness' doesn't quite convey. Released sinners are like racehorses galloping along at the start of a race.

What restricts others both physically and spiritually must be 'let go' to let them go free. The raising of Lazarus was not a resurrection but a resuscitation, he came back to the exact

situation he had left, and he had to die a second time. But Jesus urges us to share in what *he* has done, namely enable others to accept the new life that He offers.

The witnesses to this miracle respond in different ways. On the one hand there is belief, and on the other hand the plot to procure Jesus' death develops. As we know the plotters achieved their goal and in our worship we are drawn following Jesus along the road to Calvary. It is very important that we walk with Him, suffer with Him, so that we might rise again with Him. Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. They will possess eternal life here on earth as well as beyond it.

I think this leaves us with a question. Will our funerals be a celebration of our past life that assumes we have come to the end of our journey, or will it be a celebration of that life that is changed but not taken away?

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