

**5th Sunday of Lent (3rd Scrutiny)
Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski
April 7, 2019**

Homily

Most animals in the world live instinctively, making complex and specific responses to environmental stimuli without using reason.

Humans, while not without instinctive responses to worldly stimuli, still tend to be “creatures of habit.” Even Catholics are “creatures of habit” in that we tend to attend the same Mass, week-in and week-out; even sitting in the same pew. With that “creature of habit” tendency in mind, the Cathedral has rotated the three Scrutinies among the 9:00, 11:00 and 2:30 Masses, so that all of us, “creatures of habit,” have the opportunity to celebrate the Scrutinies.

Today, at this Mass, we are celebrating the third Scrutiny. However, some background is in order before I pontificate on today’s readings. Those of you who watch television series with an ongoing story-line may be familiar with the practice of summarizing the story-line from previous episodes before the action in the current episode continues. Therefore, with my best narrator-voice, let me begin with the phrase: **Previously on the Scrutinies.**

The Scrutinies are rites of spiritual self-searching and repentance. They are meant to uncover, and then heal, all that is weak, defective, or

sinful in the hearts of the elect (Cody, Charles and Daniel) who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil. Additionally, the Scrutinies are intended to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong and good in the elect. The Scrutinies are celebrated in order to deliver the elect from the power of sin and Satan, to protect them against temptation and to give them strength in **Christ who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life**. These Scrutinies, therefore, complete the conversion of the elect and deepen their resolve to hold fast to Christ and to carry out their decision to love God above all else. (By the way, that entire process of self-searching and repentance, uncovering, healing and strengthening is what Lent is intended to do for the rest of us who are already baptized in Christ.)

In the first Scrutiny, we heard about **Christ the Redeemer, who is the living water**. The pericopi from John's Gospel for that first Scrutiny was of the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, while the second Scrutiny last week focused on **Christ the Light of the World** in the scene, also from John's Gospel, in which Jesus restores the sight of the man who was blind from birth. And that brings us to today's readings in which we see Christ who is **the Resurrection and the Life...**

In today's Gospel according to John, we have three disciples interacting with Jesus: Thomas, Martha and Mary. They are all struggling to understand who Jesus is. Up to this point in John's Gospel they have

seen the signs (aka miracles) and are beginning to understand; however, it is so very hard.

All three of these Jewish disciples believed in one God; after all, monotheism is a foundational belief of the Jewish faith, and our Catholic faith, also. But how could Jesus be God, too? (Remember that we have 2,000 years of Trinitarian theology on which to base our belief in the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.) The idea that Jesus could ALSO be God was radical! Yet, given all the signs they had seen to this point, Jesus was God incarnate. It was a paradox that was approaching a crisis of faith for all three of them: Thomas, Martha and Mary. Could they worship Jesus as God?

In today's Gospel, Thomas was still quite far from the answer. His comment to his fellow apostles "Let us also go to die with him" is not exactly a statement of faith in Jesus as God the Son.

While Martha's profession of faith with the words "I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world" is stunningly revealing, her subsequent statement of doubt in response to Jesus' command to take away the stone at the tomb "Lord, by now there will be a stench" is hardly the statement of one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

When Mary fell weeping at Jesus' feet and said to him "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" she believed that while Jesus could restore to health someone who was at the edge of death, she thought that her brother, who had been dead four days, was gone forever.

Ultimately, all three of these disciples overcame their doubts and became true heroes of the faith. They overcame their doubts and confusion and came to believe that **Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life:**

- Soon after Lazarus was raised, Mary anointed Jesus' feet with a liter of costly, perfumed oil, in an act of worship.
- Thomas, doubting Thomas, in his final words in the Gospel simply declares "My Lord and my God."

Thomas, Martha, Mary and all the saints who went before us inspire us and encourage us by the example of their own struggles. However, they cannot struggle for us; we have to decide what we truly believe. God has given us the signs and the tradition that has been passed down from the apostles. As we approach the end of Lent and the coming of Easter, you have to decide: **Do you believe?**