

March 29 2020 - Fifth Sunday of Lent

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Two weeks ago, we were introduced to the theme of life-giving water ... through the story of the Samaritan woman at the well and we **thirsted** with her for the life-giving waters of baptism. And last week we added the theme of "**light**" ... as we heard about Jesus curing the man born blind. We, too, were invited to gain the spiritual sight that comes from faith.

But those stories pale ... in comparison to Jesus' triumph over death ... both physical death ... and spiritual death ... **death** ... the very **stronghold** of the evil one! These three weekends readings are so very important and so to the point that every year even during Cycles B or C these readings have been selected by the Church for the three scrutiny Masses for our elect.

Our readings for today fit beautifully together as they all speak of death yielding to new life. Our first reading from Ezekiel recalls the Babylonian captivity that left Jerusalem in ruins and the Jewish people in exile. God promises to raise the Jewish people from their graves ... from the **death** of their exile ... to new life ... to return to their own land ... and be **filled** with the spirit of God.

Paul tells the Romans to **convert** from the ways of the flesh and become alive in holiness. He informs them that the gift they received at Baptism is a **transforming** gift. The spirit of Christ will now **strengthen** them to bring the bodies of those baptized to share in the resurrection of Jesus.

The Gospel tells us that Jesus is the Resurrection and life. Those who believe in him will never die but their physical bodies will be raised in the final resurrection and they will live with him forever. And just as today is the last Sunday before Holy week ... the resurrection of Lazarus is virtually the last action of Jesus among His people! It is the final step before the triumph of Palm Sunday and all that would follow.

We ... of course ... think of Jesus ... primarily ... as the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity ... as **God** ... all knowing ... all powerful. And I wonder ... if we don't listen to the Gospel each week ... how Jesus performed this miracle or that miracle and think ... in the back of our minds ... "Well ... **yeah!** He's **God** ... so it's no big **deal!**" And ... of course ... He had **already** raised at least **two** others from the dead ... the daughter of Jairus and the son of the widow of Nain. So why is this different? There is a difference ... a very important difference!

I don't think we can really appreciate **this** triumph over death without remembering and accepting his **full humanity** ... like us in **all** things ... but without sin. This is **not** easy but very **necessary** if we are to really understand what happened at that little town near Jerusalem ... the town of **Bethany** ... the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary on that day.

We do not know very much about Lazarus, but we know Jesus **loved** him. We know a little more about his sister Martha. Martha was the one who was so **busy** with serving Jesus when he came to visit that she became **annoyed** when her sister Mary did not help her with the serving. We know a bit

more about their sister Mary, who sat at the **feet** of Jesus listening to Him **rather** than help her sister with the serving. Mary was also the one who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and dried them with her hair. She would also be the woman who would break open a jar of very expensive perfume and pour it all out onto Jesus. These were the people the very **human** Jesus ... **cared about ... deeply** ... his very ... dearest friends.

No ... we do not know much about Lazarus, but we do know Jesus loved him. So this was **not** some kindly miracle to help a **stranger**. And it must have grieved him **immensely** ... to delay his departure that two days ... his heart must have been breaking ... to wait and allow Lazarus to die. ... **“Jesus wept!”**

Now the **funeral** rites at that time lasted seven days so there were **many** mourners present to **console** the sisters. And they murmured among themselves: “Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that **this** man would not have died?”

But there can be no resurrection without death ... without dying to sin ... dying to flesh ... dying to the world ... and **only** then ... be ... resurrected ... to new **life** ... life in Christ. And so our Church invites us ... to come to the **living** water like the woman at the well ... to regain our **spiritual** sight like the man born blind.

Our Church invites us ... to use what’s left of this holy penitential season ... to reflect on our lives ... to discover those areas within our souls where ... because of sin ... we are **dead** ... or dying ... and to ask our loving ... forgiving ... healing Savior to resurrect us ... to renew His life giving Spirit in us. And this **raising** of Lazarus was to foreshadow the resurrection just a very few days later ... of Jesus himself! And that of course is the resurrection that promises new **life** ... promises **resurrection** ... to all of us.