

## **Fifth Sunday of Lent A/2014**

The readings of this fifth Sunday of Lent talk about the reality of death and the promise of eternal life. They invite us to invest deeply in God who is able to give life to our mortal bodies at the end of our pilgrimage on earth.

The first reading is related to the exile of Israel in Babylon. It describes through the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel God's promise to bring them back to their land. It explains the liberation of Israel in term of resurrection from the graves. It shows that in order to let them live, God will put his spirit in them and allow them settle in their land.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is the healer of the souls and the giver of life. Another idea is the truth that nothing is impossible to God, because whatever desperate might be the situation in which his people is, he can change it for the best for their good. The last idea is the affirmation of the faithfulness of God who fulfills the promise he makes to his people.

This text helps us understand the stakes of today's Gospel as it talks about the resurrection of Lazarus. At the outset, the Gospel tells us that Lazarus was the brother of Martha and Mary who, once, anointed Jesus' feet with perfume. It says that Jesus loved the two sisters and their brother as well. It tells us also us that as their brother Lazarus was sick, the two sisters sent a message to Jesus in order to let him know.

In the first part, the Gospel says that though Jesus was informed about the sickness of Lazarus, he nevertheless stayed where he was for two more days. Then, contrary to the advice of his disciples, he undertook to go to Judea when Lazarus was already dead.

The second part of the Gospel describes the arrival of Jesus in the village of Bethany and how the two sisters were full of grief at the idea that if he would have been there, their brother would not have died.

It describes in particular their trust in Jesus that even though their brother was already, dead, God was still capable of hearing his prayer. Then, it gives the answer of Jesus who affirms that he is the resurrection and the life so that whoever believes in him, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in him will never die.

The third part of the Gospel describes the meeting of Jesus with the grieving Mary and his deep emotion at the sight of her tears for the death of her brother. Finally, the Gospel describes the resurrection of Lazarus by showing what Jesus did in order to bring him to life.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the hope for eternal life. In fact, every one of us wants to live. We all love life and want to live it abundantly as possible as we can. But, we also realize that as beautiful as it is, life is fragile and precarious. It is crossed by problems, suffering, sickness and, eventually, death. Even if the medicine has made a lot of progress and the conditions of life have improved over the years to the point of affecting the span of our life, nonetheless, we cannot escape the reality of death, because soon or later we will die.

It is here that today's Gospel speaks to us. In fact, life is a complete mystery whose key of comprehension is not in our hands. We certainly know our past, because it is already

behind us; we understand to some extent our present, because it is still in the making, but we do not know the future, because tomorrow is unknown to us.

Like Lazarus who was enjoying the love of his sisters and like her sisters who were happy to have him, but could not prevent him to die, we will one day face the reality of death. The consequence to draw from such vision is that we are sojourners and strangers on earth. Whatever might be our life on earth, rich or poor, we will one day leave everything behind us. In that sense, Jesus has not come in order to prevent natural death to happen to us, but rather in order to prepare us to the reception of eternal life. He has not come to make this earthly life eternal, but rather to give us a hope of another world and an assurance of a life that will never end.

Therefore, as his disciples, we will all experience physical death like other people. However, because of our faith in him, our death will be changed into resurrection. That is what today's Gospel is all about, namely that Jesus has the power to transform our mortal bodies into glorious ones. Moreover, we are on pilgrimage on earth, because our true home is above. That is why as long as we are on earth, we are journeying not to the sunset, but to the sunrise of our life. When everything of what we have built on earth will stop, we know with the assurance of faith that our true life will start.

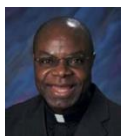
Does it mean that the present life in the world is meaningless because we will die one day? Not at all; on the contrary, that makes our task in the world urgent and important, because our future life depends on how we lead our life now, whether it is with Jesus or without him, in faithfulness to him or in rebellion to him. What is at stake, therefore, is the truth that what we build on earth does not have finality in itself. Rather, it is in preparation and an anticipation of the world and the life to come.

In that perspective, the goal of Jesus is not that we live eternally on earth, but that from the way we live on earth, we come to live one day with him eternally in heaven. Then, we understand why he says: "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die".

With this in mind, it becomes clear that the death and the resurrection of Lazarus have character of exemplarity. What happened to him is exactly what will happen to us who believe in Jesus. We will certainly die in our bodies, but in order to rise to life anew. Jesus will not abandon us in our tombs. He will raise us so that we share in his resurrection.

In that sense, we have to take advantage of the present time in order to prepare ourselves for eternal life. We must renounce sin and use the grace we receive in the sacraments, especially in confession, in order to strengthen our faith in him. That is the appeal of this time of lent as we approach slowly to the celebrations of Easter. May God bless you all!

**Ezekiel 37: 12-14; Romans 8: 8-11; John 11: 1-45**



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