

Fifth Sunday of Lent A2023

My friends, in each one of us there is a deep desire to live abundantly. Each one of us, indeed, does everything in his power to value, cherish and protect his life, as possible as he can. However, each one of us realizes also that, as beautiful as it is, life is fragile and precarious. It is crossed by difficulties, suffering, sickness and, eventually, death.

Even though the medicine has made a lot of progress nowadays and the conditions of life have improved a lot over the years to the point of affecting the span of our life, nonetheless, we cannot escape the reality of death. Soon or later, we will die.

The loss of our beloved ones we would like to see living, but we could not keep with us instructs us enough on the mystery in which life is wrapped. Why are we born? Why do we do all these different and beautiful activities in which we are involved and, then, leave them without memory or remembrance? Is not this again a mystery?

When we deal with a mystery, it means that something is out of our control because not everything depends on us. The "Imitation of Christ" says, "Our life is not always ours to control; it is for God to dispose this as He wills: to give comfort when He wills, as much as He wills and to whom He wills, and no more".

The key of comprehension to the mystery of life is only in the hands of God. He alone understands what we cannot and knows what we do not. We, as human beings, know certainly 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, like his sisters who were happy to have him, but could not prevent him from dying, we will one day face the reality of death. The prospect of such reality leads us to acknowledge that we are sojourners and strangers on earth. Whatever might be our life on earth, richer or poorer we will one day leave everything behind us!

My Friends, Jesus has not come to prevent natural death to happen to us, but to prepare for us the 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. We are on pilgrimage on earth; our true home is above. Jesus has preceded us in the house of his Father and our Father to prepare for us a place. Then, he will come back to take us with him so that where he is we too might be.

Like any other people, we will experience physical death. However, because of our faith in Jesus, our death will be changed into resurrection. The internal power of God received in baptism will live out and lead us to live eternally in his presence. Then, what we have achieved inwardly with Christ will change our outer reality. As St Paul says, "If the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the One who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also".

Thus, as disciples of Jesus, 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 as Jesus will transform our mortal bodies into the glorious ones.

By letting Lazarus die, Jesus tells us that he has not come to prevent physical death. He has not come to break the natural course of events, including the course of human life. He has not come to make the earthly life eternal, but rather to give another life that will have no end. So, the mission 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, it makes sense he can say: "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".

The death and the resurrection of Lazarus have a character of example. What happened to him is what will happen to us who believe in Jesus. For sure, we will die in our bodies, but in order to rise to new life. Jesus will not abandon us in our tombs. He will raise us so that we share in his resurrection.

All of us are Lazarus, and Jesus wants us to live. Jesus wants to set us free to live the new life that he has already given us in baptism, to live it with joy and enthusiasm, knowing that we have been called by God to something greater than we can imagine. Then, the promise made to prophet Ezekiel will resound strongly: "(...) I will open your graves and have you rise from them. (...) I will put my spirit in you that you may live. (...) I have promised, and I will do it (...).

By raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus teaches us that he is the master of life and death. He is the one who makes the impossible, possible. He can transform our destiny, to make it similar to his and as glorious as his is. He will call upon our names, as he did with Lazarus, and we will come out of our tombs. So let's step out of the tombs of our rebellions and sins. Let's remove the stone from our eyes that prevents us from seeing his light. Let us take the cotton out of our ears that prevents us from hearing his word. Let us remove the plug from our mouth that prevents us from proclaiming his praise.

This Lenten season, each one of us has to identify the tomb in which he finds himself right now. Jesus weeps when he finds us tied up in the tomb. He is sad when he finds us tied up by the habit of sin, addictions, past hurts, unforgiveness, etc. He wants us to be untied and set free. Let us trust him; he has a better solution to our problem than we think.

Let us walk this Lenten season free toward Easter, like an inmate liberated from prison. Let us claim our Catholic heritage and reach out to embrace everyone to share with us the life of communion with God. Let us go free, unbound. May God bless you all!

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



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Contact: www.mbala.org
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