

Homily for 5th Week of Lent

We're a week away from the start of Holy Week. Our Lord now has his sights set on Jerusalem, and the pace is quickening. In these next two weeks, we're living just one part of the Gospel passage from today: an encounter with the reality of suffering and death. Jesus is asking us to have faith in him.

In today's First Reading the prophet Ezekiel reminds us of the Lord's promise to not only to bring us back to life but to bring us home.

It doesn't take theology or catechism to realize that death is the biggest "game over" we experience in life. Even believing in the Resurrection does not spare us from fearing the fact that we must be resurrected from something intrinsically unpleasant: death. Even as we lower our loved ones into the tomb, we are encouraged by the promise of the Lord that death will not have the last word. We'll not only be restored to life; we'll be brought home and returned to those we love.

In today's Second Reading Paul reminds us that faith in being restored to life is not enough. We must believe that we have to bear Christ within us so that the Spirit may restore us to life.

If we just believe in reincarnation or being absorbed into some cosmic energy, or just living on in the memory of those we leave behind or some cold stone monument, God's power cannot restore us to life. When we receive baptism, we die in Christ. We go under the water to represent descending into death, but we also bind our fate with that of Christ's and rise from the waters of death into new life.

Next Sunday we'll remember Christ's journey from Incarnation to Passion and Death. However, in faith and in Christ, we know that was not the end of Our Lord's story, and it will not be the end of ours either.

In the Gospel today, Jesus shows us our faith combined with him is something much more. It is not just a passive faith that takes the shots as they come. Through Martha's faith in Christ, we see the power of belief conjoined to God. When news reaches him that Lazarus was sick, he didn't go hurrying to Bethany and said the illness would not end in death. However, he also added something a little more mysterious, something the disciples didn't pick up on: the illness was "for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

In our life of faith, we must be attentive to Our Lord's words, because often at first glance we can pass over what he is trying to say to us. Faith is not just an assent to something presented to us as credible. It is also a source of light. We can go back to Our Lord's words over and over in faith and find new light and new meaning.

No one expected Our Lord would be able to bring back someone who'd been dead for days. (The Jews of the time believed the soul hung about the body for three days – so someone was not truly dead until the third day: hence, Jesus waits to prove beyond doubt he can raise the dead.) All the other people he'd raised from the dead had only recently died. When Jesus told Martha her brother would rise, she knew, but she just thought Jesus was consoling her with the Jewish belief – even before Christ's Resurrection – that Lazarus would be raised with everyone else on the last day.

Martha's faith had been strong enough to withstand not seeing Jesus for days and watching her brother die. It was strong enough to be the instrument for the sign he wanted to work for many other believers: the raising of her brother from death.

So, he invited her to believe that even those who believed and died would live. She put her faith in him, not just the Jewish teaching about a future resurrection. When Jesus ordered the tomb to be opened, Martha's faith was rewarded, and the power of God through those who believe was shown.

In Charles Dicken's novel *Great Expectations*, the orphan Pip receives a windfall from an anonymous benefactor after living in poverty with his abusive sister. He'd been frequenting the home of a strange, wealthy, reclusive woman, Miss Havisham, and, due to his romantic interest in her adopted daughter (Estella), assumed the windfall came from her and continued to curry her favour.

Wealth doesn't help Pip grow as he should. He's so concerned with impressing Estella, a girl trained by Miss Havisham to disdain men, that he starts to swell in self-importance too and believe he's being prepared for a life among the elite and his benefactor means he's someone important.

Pip's expectations are dashed when he discovers that his benefactor is an escaped convict (Abel Magwitch) that he was forced to help as a boy who later went to Australia and made a fortune and wanted to repay Pip for helping him. Suddenly his newfound wealth was tainted, his reputation threatened, and he realized Miss Havisham had been insincere to him. Estella marries someone else. This experience forces Pip to reframe his expectations. Eventually, he reconciles with Magwitch, appreciates his kindness, and is with him on this deathbed.

What has Our Lord said in your life that might be worth a second look? What hints has he dropped to get you to take that second look? And how will that second look change your life?

In the light of that second look, Jesus wants to work miracles through your life, not just for us, but for those we love, just like he did through Mary and Martha for Lazarus. Ask him for the grace to be that instrument of faith that unlocks his power of life in so many lives.

As you re-examine your life, keep the end of today's story in mind: let the light of the Resurrection guide you through the gloom of that mystery of sin that put God on a cross for your salvation.