

5th Sunday of Lent (A)

St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes

April 1, 2, 2017

Of course one cannot ignore today's story of Lazarus being raised from the dead. I am sure each one of us would be caught up in the raising of any one from the dead, if we knew it was going to happen, or knew that it just did happen. When preparing the homily I did actually try to look only at the first two Scriptures for today. Ezechiel, our prophet for today, says, *"I will open your graves and have you rise from them, you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and have you rise from them, O my people!"*. But with this as the First Scripture for today, you can't ignore the gospel event. And St. John does not want his story to be ignored.

I say this because of where St. John actually places the account of raising Lazarus in his gospel. John has this story of Lazarus placed right exactly in the middle of his gospel (Chapter 11). Everything in Chapters 1-10 lead up to this event, and everything in Chapters 12-21 are to be seen in light of this event involving Lazarus. The key lines being, *"I am the resurrection and the life: whoever believes in me, though he should die, will come to life and whoever is alive and believes in me will never die."* As we reflected briefly last weekend, God is way more than rules and regulations God is a constant outflow of life. Everyone who approaches God and seeks to be close to God comes away from the experience with greater life. Today's gospel is certainly the example *'par excellence'*. until at least we get to Jesus' own resurrection. Today's example is really only a resuscitation Lazarus would eventually die again. Jesus would be truly raised from the death in resurrection his physical body was not restored, but transformed. Remember the story of the Transfiguration from the 2nd Sunday of Lent Jesus was seen as glowing; he shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. This was a foreshadowing of the real resurrection that was to happen later but who could have known then? And there is no doubt that hope in the resurrection is the main attraction for those connected to religion. Every religion professes some form of life after death. Most all religious people live the way they do because of their hope that after death they will find comfort, solace, and even fulness of life in God. Hear again, those key lines of St. John: *"I am the resurrection and the life: whoever believes in me, though he should die, will come to life and whoever is alive and believes in me will never die."*

Nonetheless, I offer you some other words from today's Gospel text that are also very important, even though they often go unnoticed and under-valued by most of us. Maybe they are even more important words. I refer to the words of Martha. During the little conversation she has with Jesus, she says, *"I know my brother will rise, in the resurrection on the last day."* I think that is when most of us think the resurrection will happen, and certainly we are correct in thinking that. But then is there nothing now? Does the resurrection happen only at the end of time, and does it all happen together?

Or, is it possible that something of the resurrection can happen, and in fact does happen, even during our life-times here?

I think this latter is worth considering. And we have good reason and sound basis for thinking this. Listen to the words of St. Paul in our Second Reading the Church wants us to hear these words as well: *"...you are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of righteousness."* That Jesus dwells in us now, or at least desires to dwell in us now, is as much a teaching and belief in our Church as is that about the resurrection of the dead at the end. Yet we don't ever give as much weight to this fact as we do to the other one, that resurrection comes at the end, and only at the end. Even Ezechiel, who talks clearly about 'opening graves' and having people 'rise from them', also speaks clearly today of the Spirit within us now: *"I will put my spirit in you that you may live"* And, if you remember back to the last two weekends, each of the significant people found Jesus now ... Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well regarding the Messiah: *"I am He, the one speaking with you."*: to the man born blind regarding the Son of Man, *"You have seen him, the one speaking with you is he."*, and today, to Martha about the resurrection, *"I am the resurrection and the life."* Jesus says the same to us - "I am here with you now ... in Sacrament of Baptism, in Reconciliation, in the Eucharist especially.

What difference does it make whether one puts focus on resurrection (and these other things as well) at the end of life, or that we have some share in the resurrection even now?

Personally am I playing my odds to die in God's favor at some future time, or do I enjoy God's favor now?

Do I tow the line, so to speak, so I am in God's favor at the end, or do I live fully in God's Spirit now? Do I feel that God is at a distance most of the time. And I'll make contact when I feel the need, or do I have a sense of God in my life here and now?

In the parish the Faith Formation Commissions and Catholic School Boards in the Archdiocese are reading a book entitled, Church On The Move. While it mostly addresses Sunday liturgy, it speaks of other matters as well. Here are a few samples:

Pope Francis: We cannot keep ourselves shut up in parishes ... when so many people are waiting for the Gospel. To go out as ones sent. It is not enough to simply open the door in welcome because they come, but we must go out through that door to seek and meet the people!

St. John Henry Newman: "I sought to hear the voice of God and climbed the topmost steeple, but God declared: "Go down again - I dwell among the people."

Rick Warren, Pastor of a mega-church: (Saddleback) "The church must grow larger and smaller at the same time – larger through worship (weekend services) and smaller through fellowship (small groups.)

Pope Francis: "God is not afraid of new things."

Vatican Council II: “Once cannot find anything more religious and more joyful in sacred celebrations than a whole congregation expressing its faith and devotion in song.”

How do people see us? How do we see ourselves? As people hoping for something in the end?, or as people who know they already have something now new sight, new life, even a bit of the promised resurrection?