

Sunday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Year A

Ez 37: 12-14

Psalm 130

Rom 8: 8-11

John 11: 3-7,17,20-27,33-45

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Today's scripture readings from Ezekiel, Paul, and John center on death: death of a nation, death to self, and death of a beloved friend. But the lesson we need to take from today's scripture is not the inevitability of physical death, with its sorrow and confusion, but the union we must all form with Jesus through faith.

Recently, my nephew lost his courageous battle with cancer shortly after his 39th birthday. In the days preceding his death, I had stormed heaven with prayers for a miracle asking God to restore David to full health of mind and body. But the miracle did not happen and I was angry with God. But on reflection, I thought that if I am going to be logical about this, if I am going to be angry at death, I have to be angry with the gift of human life. Humans are on a journey. They are born, grow, mature, do great things in service to others, love and die only to be born again to love and live forever. Did I not want the gift of my nephew in my life? Did I not want the opportunity to know and love him as he knew and loved me? Was not the miracle I was praying for right in front of me for these past 39 years? Was not David the miracle and his life, rich with examples of courage, love and service, the symbol and reality of his spiritual union with Christ in faith?

We are all called to establish this deep union with Christ in faith. In the first reading today from Ezekiel, the prophet promises a defeated and dispersed nation that they will rise again and experience a new life that springs from the spirit of God. John in his gospel story depicts Jesus as challenging all of us to believe in him. "I am the resurrection and the life...." Jesus says and the question for each of us is: "Do you believe? "

Jesus' friend, Lazarus, was resuscitated by Jesus but inevitably, as the years unfolded, Lazarus would have to face death. Jesus, however, is calling us to believe in a resurrection that is lasting and transforms us in our relationship to him.

You often hear people saying that they are not afraid of death but it is the dying that scares them. Death does threaten life but it has no power where there is faith. Our challenge is to build a life of faith where our relationship and union with Jesus is so strong that physical death excites little fear in us. Paul tells us that if we believe that Christ was raised from the dead, then it follows that we who are united with Christ through faith will also rise.

As we pray and work for a true conversion of ourselves during Lent and anticipate the joy and peace of the Resurrection and the new life that it promises, let us resolve to face the reality of our own death and the death of those we love with unwavering faith. In our sinfulness, let us seek reconciliation with our God and with one another as we remember today's responsorial psalm : "with the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption".

And, finally, let us not be afraid to show compassion to those who mourn, knowing that God's loving kindness can redeem us and lead us into resurrection and life.