

## FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Ezekiel 37:12-14

Romans 8:8-11

John 11:1-45

The passage from the Gospel of John for the fifth Sunday of Lent is the Gospel passage that was read at the funeral of my cousin seven years ago. On that day, it put before us as a family the fact and reality of death, but – and this is an oh so important but – it also offered us the hope and promise of eternal life. And this is the reason it is used on the fifth Sunday of Lent – the last Sunday before Holy Week, where we liturgically experience the Paschal Mystery – the death and resurrection of our Lord.

Surprisingly, when Jesus receives the news that his good friend, Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha is sick and near to death, he does not rust to see him and comfort him or his family. He takes his time getting there.

However, upon arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days already. As he approaches the house, Jesus is met by Martha who is less than happy to see her friend. Instead, she starts to really give it to him – I mean really chew on him! What does she say? *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”* Martha is clearly angry. It is easy to look back on this scene with 2000 years of hindsight and theological understanding and say to ourselves, “Man, Martha needs to take it easy...she’s speaking to God.” But we need to understand that in her anger, she is expressing a deep faith and belief in the Lord. We know this by her next statement: *“But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.”* Even though Martha is angry with Jesus, **she has not given up on Jesus**. Jesus assures her that her brother will rise again and then he proclaims clearly, *“I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me...will never die.”* After saying this, he looks directly at Martha and asks her, *“Do you believe this?”* And without any hesitation, she replies, *“Yes, Lord. I...believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God.”* Despite her loss, grief, and pain, Martha is still able to have faith and confidence in Jesus as the resurrection and the life who has come into the world.

I think that this Gospel passage functions as a sign-post that points and leads us to Holy Week. On Holy Thursday, we are asked to stand with Jesus as he is betrayed and denied. On Good Friday he will be condemned, beaten, and crucified. He will die. There is no way of ignoring or avoiding the reality of the death of Jesus. But the cross is not our final destination. It is only a stage on our journey – not only through Lent – but in our lives too. With the women who stood by him, we too have to stay at the foot of the cross before we experience the joy of the resurrection. On Good Friday, we are asked to experience the fact and reality of death – and not just Jesus’ death – but our own mortality as well. But we are also asked to have faith in Jesus as Martha did. As we take another step on our Lenten journey, Jesus says to each one of us, **“I am the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this?”**

Difficult as death and the loss of a family member or a friend is, we are asked not to lose faith in God. In a broader context, amid the distress and chaos of the Covid-19 pandemic, we are asked not to lose faith in God. God will not abandon us at our time of need. We have this assurance in the first reading from the prophet Ezekiel: *“I will put my spirit in you and you may live.”* Through this Gospel, Jesus offers us the promise and hope of new and everlasting life.

As we face the reality of Good Friday, let us also look towards the new life of Easter Sunday. Jesus is still the resurrection and the life. If we believe in him, we shall not die.