

Our Lady of Lourdes

5th Sunday of Lent

March 21, 2010

Readings:

Ezekiel 37:12-14

Romans 8:8-11

John 11:1-45

Jesus' raising of Lazarus, read as today's Gospel is really the climax of his public life in the Fourth Gospel. "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died". Both sisters give expression to an aspect of grief virtually universal among those who mourn the recent death of loved ones: a numbing sense of the absence of God. Jesus' interaction with Martha is the centerpiece of the whole story. Jesus assures her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha's response to this is to express belief in her brother's eventual share in the resurrection of the just at the last day—a comforting thought from her conventional faith but not one that really addresses the present loss. In response she hears from Jesus one of his most famous statements: "I am the resurrection and the life; those who believe in me, even though they die, will live; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Jesus sweeps the perspective from the indefinite future ("the last day") to the present: "I am ...". The statement does not deny that believers will continue to die—that is, die in a physical sense. But their "living" and "believing" in Jesus will ensure that physical death is not the end of the story. In this sense they "will live" and "will never die". In the end, of course, Jesus does bring Lazarus back to life—after his being dead in the tomb for four days, a length of time after which, it was believed, corruption would have set in irreversibly.

Although this miracle forms the dramatic climax of the narrative, it is not really the theological highpoint. That occurs in the exchange between Jesus and Martha that I've just mentioned. What Lazarus receives is simply a return to this present human life, from which one day he will have to depart again in death; he gets a brief reprieve, so to speak. However, in line with the pattern we have observed in regard to all these long narratives in the Fourth Gospel, the miraculous remedy of a human need—here the very basic need for life itself—functions as a symbol of a much more significant gift that Jesus has come to proclaim, not just to individuals such as Lazarus, but to all people—all, who respond in faith. The restoration of Lazarus to physical human life is simply a symbol of the "eternal life" which Jesus, as "Resurrection and Life," comes to offer to all.

Throughout the last few weeks, we have heard of the works of Jesus which point us to the victory of Easter. The barrier that was broken down between him and the Samaritan woman as she found 'resurrection' in her daily life. We've heard of the new life that was given to the man born blind.

A person, who experienced not only physical healing, but also spiritual healing, as he worshipped his God and found faith. Bringing people together who appear different, responding to basic human needs, and last but not least, offering the very gift of life, a life that never ends.

As we prepare to end the Lenten season, may we remember what Jesus offers to his people. And it all begins with the words of a distraught sister, when she was able to say 'yes lord I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the son of God.'