

Homily –Fifth Sunday of Lent C (Third Scrutiny ‘Cycle A’ Readings)

“Take away the stone!” Beloved in Christ, today is the Fifth Sunday of Lent. We have our third and final scrutiny of the Elect. These words from our Gospel passage (John 11:1-45) remind us of God’s promise: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek 36:25-26). Unlike the case of Lazarus, only God can remove the metaphysical stone that seals the tomb of the death caused by Original Sin. May God remove the stone entombing our Elect and set them free. Amen.

Each year the scrutiny readings show us a new opportunity; a new beginning; a new lease of life. For the Samaritan woman, she was given a new understanding that changed her whole life. For the man born blind who received the gift of sight, it was symbolically a “new life”, a new relationship to the world around him. Today’s celebration, with the physical resurrection of Lazarus, indicates the climax of the new opportunity God offers us. It shows, beyond any reasonable doubt, that even death cannot frustrate the plan of God for our salvation.

Our Elect and the unbaptized, in as much as they still have Original Sin are “in a spiritual bondage” under the metaphysical condition of primordial death. Jesus will prevail for them at the Easter Vigil. The Elect will hear him cry out, “Lazarus, come out!” “Thomas, come out!” “Margaret, come out!” Unbind him; let him go! Unbind her, let her go! He will grant them a new opportunity, a new beginning, a new understanding, a new relationship; they will never be the same again. God declared in the First Reading (Ezek 37:12-14) “O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them, and bring you back to the land of Israel.... I will put my spirit in you that you may live, and I will settle you upon your land; thus you shall know that I am the LORD.” God never fails.

The grave, dear friends, symbolizes darkness and gloom, a situation that appears hopeless. Only God can open our graves, cleanse us of our corruption and defilements, and put his Spirit in us that we may live. God does this through the gift of his Holy Spirit. Hence, in our Second Reading (Rom 8:8-11), St. Paul declares emphatically, “Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.... If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit dwelling in you.”

One crucial point today is that God is absolutely greater than our contingency situations. When Lazarus was

sick, his sisters hurriedly made a “sick call” to Jesus, “Master, the one you love is ill.” Jesus was expected to come immediately. However, in spite of his great love for the family of Lazarus, he deliberately delayed for two more days and Lazarus died. Jesus had his plans and knew exactly what he was going to do. In his words, “This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Lazarus had died and was buried for four days before Jesus and his disciples came. Although Martha and Mary were happy to see Jesus, we notice the instantaneous blame game: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

Beloved, God is God; no situation is beyond Him. Remember, Adam and Eve were “sickened” under temptation and in grave danger of dying through Original Sin. God could have intervened immediately to prevent them from falling and incurring the death of Original Sin. He did not. Here, we see why, sometimes, God allows evil for the sake of a greater good. Again, as Christ puts it, “This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Think about it! Which would have been greater? Was it to heal Lazarus of his sickness or to raise Lazarus from the dead? Certainly, to resurrect him after he died was greater; to deliver Adam and Eve after all hope was lost was greater. Hence, every Easter Vigil, the Church celebrates this mystery in the Exultet, singing, “What good would life have been to us, had Christ not come as our Redeemer?” “O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!” The life we have now in Christ Jesus is far greater than the life we had before the Fall. God will grant our Elect this new and better life.

Finally, Jesus declares, “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” Martha said, “Yes!” But when Jesus commanded, “Take away the stone!” Martha betrayed her faith limitation, saying, “Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days.” What a disappointment! Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?” We too are reminded to have an unflinching faith in the limitless power of God. When Jesus resurrected Lazarus, all signs of decomposition had vanished; even the sickness that killed him, cancer, stroke, or hypertension, was gone. So, when Jesus raises our Elect at the Easter Vigil, they will be spiritually whole. The words of Scripture will be fulfilled: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2Cor 5:17).