

5th Sunday of Lent. Readings Year A. Ez 37:12-14, Rom 8:8-11 & Jn 11:1-45

Theme: "DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?"

On this 5th Sunday of Lent, we celebrate the Third Scrutiny, the last one for the elect. At the end of the homily, we'll have the Rite of Handing the Lord's Prayer to each one of them. Please continue to pray for them as they are getting ready to be received into the Church this Easter. As we all know, next weekend is the celebration of Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord. Palm Sunday marks the beginning of our Holy Week which leads us to Easter.

The readings of this 5th Sunday of Lent are centered on death, grief, faith, resurrection, and new life. Faith is the major theme in the readings. In the first reading, the prophet Ezekiel sees his people in Babylonian exile in terms of death and their coming back home as resurrection, a spiritual renewal. He reminded them of the power of the Spirit of God that would bring new life to them. Through his prophecy, Ezekiel brought hope and comfort to his people who needed it.

Remember, by the virtue of our baptism, we're also prophets. How are we bringing a message of hope and comfort to those who need it in our community? In the second reading, St. Paul reminds the Christian community in Rome and all of us about the importance of the Spirit of God. He warns all Christians against the flesh/human weaknesses, sins. He advised us always to let the Spirit of God dwell in us. If we follow his advice, then the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead will one day raise our mortal bodies also to be with Him in heaven. St. Paul reminds us that our goal in life is to be in union with God in heaven. He says this will only be possible if we are not in the flesh but live in the Spirit of God.

If you will remember the Gospel reading of this past weekend about the healing of a man born blind, John described Jesus as the Light of the world. In today's Gospel reading of raising his beloved friend, Lazarus back to life, John presents Jesus as the Life of the world. Indeed, Jesus is both the Light and the Life of the world. Besides John's passion account, his account of Jesus' raising Lazarus is the longest continuous narrative in his Gospel. Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, sent a message to their beloved family friend, Jesus, about their brother's ailment. They expected Jesus to come immediately to heal their brother from dying. Jesus took 4 days to honor their invitation, and by then Lazarus had died and been buried. Could you imagine what his sisters were feeling when Jesus did not immediately come to save their brother from dying? From the Gospel, one would notice Mary was deeply grieving the death of her beloved brother that she stayed home except when she heard of Jesus' arrival. John presents Martha as a perfect model of faith for us all. She said to Jesus, "Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even I know that whatever you ask God, God will give you." Jesus assured her that her brother will rise since he/Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Jesus then asked her: "DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?" Martha continued again to make a profound profession of faith in Jesus: "YES, LORD I HAVE COME TO BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD, THE ONE WHO IS COMING INTO THE WORLD."

Fellow parishioners, Martha is truly a model of faith for us all. In her grief, she continues to hold onto her faith in God, she never lets go of her faith in Jesus. Many of us, if not all, only believe in Jesus when all is going well and as we want it. We say God is good, meaning things are going the way we expect. Unfortunately, when things going the way we dislike, we turn from Jesus, let go of our faith.

There are many lessons we may learn from these readings today, especially the Gospel. Jesus' delay to honor his invitation to heal Lazarus was meant to prove to his disciples and all of us that Jesus is truly the Master of life and death. By raising Lazarus back to life, Jesus is reminding us about the importance of having faith in him and his heavenly Father. John tells us, "Now many of the Jews who had come to Mary and Martha had seen what he had done began to believe in him." He also tells us that Jesus told his disciples that Lazarus' death will glorify God and will make his disciples have faith in him.

If you recall my homily last weekend, I said whatever happens to us good/bad, let us try to see God in it. Personally, questioning God does not help me. I have learned over the years that asking God to help me to see His will in what is happening to me gives meaning and purpose to my life. What about reading that Jesus wept at the death of his beloved friend Lazarus? As you may know, "AND JESUS WEPT" is the shortest verse in the Bible. By Jesus weeping, he is telling us it is healthy to weep. By weeping and expressing his anger over the death of his beloved friend Lazarus, he shows he genuinely cares/loves him. Jesus is also an excellent model for us all during our grief.

As we are preparing to celebrate Palm Sunday next weekend and then Easter, let us take some times/days to reflect and meditate on our faith in God and his beloved Son, Jesus Christ. With all that is happening in our world today, we need the faith of Martha to find meaning and purpose in our life. May our Holy Mother Mary and her beloved husband, St. Joseph, intercede for us as we follow their beloved Son Jesus Christ's passion, death, and resurrection next week.