

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT; Cycle – A; March 26th 2023
Ezekiel 37: 12-14; Romans 8: 8-11; John 11: 1-45

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

St. John led us so far through the two great themes, **Christ the Living Water and Christ the Light**. This Sunday he draws our attention to the final theme **Christ the life or Christ the Resurrection**, in the light of the long episode of the raising of Lazarus. Besides the raising of Lazarus from the dead, Jesus also raised the daughter of Jairus and the son of the widow in Nain. But the raising of Lazarus ranks to be the most astonishing to the people of his time. For, according to the Jewish traditional belief the soul of a dead person somehow remains with the body three more days. After that the soul departs from the body, never to return, and that is when the body starts decomposing. When Martha objects to the opening of the tomb and says, “**Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days**” – she is expressing this common view that now it is a hopeless case. We may wonder; did Jesus delay his arrival intentionally so that the situation might become hopeless or impossible? G.K. Chesterton, the English author once said, “**Hope means hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all.**”

Martha was upset over the delay of Jesus and she expressed her displeasure, saying, “*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*” *But Jesus answers, “Your brother will rise.”* As a Jew Martha didn’t have any doubt about the resurrection of her brother. But when Jesus said, “**I am the resurrection and life**”- not only Martha but also the people gathered there were shocked. *For, they knew that only God is the author of life and resurrection.* So the statement of Jesus was nothing but blasphemy, as he claimed equality with God. But by raising Lazarus from the dead and giving his life back, he proved that indeed, he is **the author of life and only he could defeat death.**

In John this is the last miracle of Jesus and he had specific reason to work this miracle. Remember, this miracle stands at the threshold of the Passion and death of Jesus. By bringing Lazarus back to life Jesus wanted his disciples to know that Jesus’ imminent death is not the end of the road rather he has full control over his death. By rising from the dead he proved it fully. **The resurrection of Jesus is also the assurance of our own resurrection which would take place one day.**

We all consider our life as the most precious gift given by God and we try our best to preserve the same in this world. It is indeed our duty to protect our life by using all possible means and abusing it through wrong choices is a grave sin. But no matter whatever we do, we have to leave this world one day or other. Death always puzzles

human beings and it is considered to be the most unwelcoming guest in our life and families. It steps into our lives unannounced and uninvited. No doubt, nothing in life is more certain than death. So naturally many are concerned about, *'after death, what?'* *Is there any life beyond this world?* Many think that by death everything has come to a close; our aspirations and ambitions, our ties and bond no more continue in the world. The permanent separation from our loved ones chills our hearts. *The uncertainty of what lies beyond this world and the lack of faith in Jesus and eternal life make the lives of many people miserable at the moment of death.* So there is a tendency in us to cling to this world as long as possible. People are ready to undergo any hard treatment to prolong the life at least for another month also. Though the scientists claim that one day they will be able to destroy death and give man eternal life here on earth itself, so far they cannot even predict exactly the time of one's death. But over 2000 years ago somebody defeated death and promised mankind eternal life and he is nobody but **Jesus Christ. He could claim, "I am the resurrection and life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."**

Eternal life is a free gift Jesus offers to anyone with one condition, **"Whoever believes in me, even if he dies will live."** So the faith or belief in Jesus Christ is essential for us to attain eternal life. It is not just enough we are baptized and confirmed or claiming that we are Christians; rather only the one who keeps the faith and expresses it in action will have eternal life. In John's gospel 3: 16 Jesus says, **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life."** Jesus continues in the same chapter, **"Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."** There is no shortcut to reach heaven. Sometimes people are under the impression that the Last Rite will be a free ticket to heaven. But this Sacrament will never do any good to a person who didn't believe in Jesus Christ. In the Acts of the Apostles 4: 12, speaking about the eternal life or salvation, St. Peter writes to his community very confidently that only through Jesus Christ there is life. He says, **"There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved;"** but only the name of Jesus Christ and the belief in him, Amen.