

**Homily for April 6, 2003
5th Sunday of Lent Cycle A
3rd Scrutiny – RCIA**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Ezekiel 37:12-14
Romans 8:8-11
John 11:1-45**

Life does indeed triumph over death.

For those about to make the step – or leap – into the arms of the Church at the Easter Vigil, these three weeks have been full of scriptural images to savor and to treasure.

First there was the living water – the water sought after by the woman at the well – the water they will receive at Baptism. Naming and claiming where we are arid and barren, we trust that God will provide the healing, nourishing moisture. Then there was the granting of sight to the blind – a new way of seeing everything in life, and the promise that our eyes of faith will not deceive us. Our Elect examined the blindness we share and where we desperately need insight and sight to be refreshed. And now, this fifth Sunday of Lent, there is the greatest gift of all, and the hardest to accept – coming back from the dead. This week our Elect have examined where we reek in rotteness and decay and how life triumphs even over what appears to be lifelessness. Our Gospel proclaims the belief that Jesus is the Messiah, and that anything Jesus asks of God, God will do. Note that Martha doesn't ask that Lazarus be brought back to life; she merely proclaims her belief in the life to come after death.

But Jesus grants the impossible, and after four days in the tomb, Lazarus comes forth. We can assume that he took up his life again, to the great rejoicing of his family and friends.

But wait a minute, some people have countered. What's the big deal? Lazarus will just have to die again. So why did Jesus bother to bring back to life someone who has yet another death ahead of him?

I would suggest that the answer lies in the difference between resurrection and restored life. Resurrection awaits us at the end of our days, but we all have a chance to renew and restore our lives each and every new dawn of every new day.

Ask someone in recovery from addiction if their life, which surely would have ended badly and soon had they kept to their destructive course, if that life is now worth living, if they regret the second chance they are offered every day. Chances are that you will hear a lot of empathy with Lazarus. No one in the midst of recovery would trade places with the dead self he or she once was. This new chance, this new life, this new opportunity to grow and learn and change and love is a true rebirth.

And that is, I believe, why this gospel is here to nourish our catechumens and our candidates for full

communion. The life they will receive when they enter the deadly tomb of baptism, or when they are claimed by and for the Spirit, is altogether new and changed. They are new creations, and their newness binds us all, reminds us all of the promise of Baptism that Jesus has shown to be fulfilled by bringing his friend Lazarus back to life.

While our elect for the sacraments of Easter journey to the table by means of the water bath of baptism, the rest of us who have been baptized journey to the table by means of a second baptism or third or fourth or millionth – the sacrament of reconciliation. We celebrate that sacrament Monday evening at 7:00 o'clock. It is safe to name and claim our aridity, our desert places, our blindness, the so many places in which we're dead and stinking – it's safe to name all that to be in touch with it, because we meet God there and primarily there. Because God doesn't love us any more if we do good or any less if we do bad. God only loves, and our sole task as human beings is to receive, to make way, to make room for that invasion of love. So at 7:00 o'clock Monday evening we're all welcome to celebrate this fine sacrament to prepare us for the Easter season.

A famous poet once wrote, "I do not look for fears amid stars beyond stars where no human race is. I have it in me so much nearer home to scare myself with my own desert places."

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triumph over death.