

**Homily for March 13, 2005
Fifth Sunday of Lent (A)**

By Father Charles Bowes

Ezekiel 37:12-14

Psalm 130:1-8

Romans 8:8-11

John 11:1-45

By faith, we know that death has no victory over anyone anymore.

In the readings for today, we are led past the inevitability of death to a consideration of life after death.

The Gospel contains a story well-known to us all. We see three people whom Jesus loves dearly: Martha, with whom Jesus carries on a profound theological conversation; Mary, who believes that Jesus has power over the life of her brother; and Lazarus, whom Jesus calls back from the clutches of death. What Jesus does for Lazarus will also be done for the believer – but even more so. Lazarus is simply resuscitated. His earthly life is restored to him. Resurrection is about eternal life, and that is the ultimate gift Jesus offers the believer. Lazarus will eventually die again. Those who receive the gift of eternal life will never die again. This account may describe love among friends, but it is primarily a story about faith.

Speaking to his disciples, Jesus says, "I am glad for you that I was not there, that you may believe." He then tells Martha, "Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." At the end of the account we read, "Many...began to believe in him."

Just what is it that we are called to believe? Is it that one who has died will be resuscitated? As wonderful as this "rising" may have been, it was not

really lasting. Though Lazarus may have been given a second chance at life, eventually he would again face the inevitability of death. No, we are called to believe in something much more profound. We are called to believe in a resurrection that transforms, a resurrection that is lasting.

While the account of the raising of Lazarus is quite straightforward, Jesus' words to Martha are not. He says that either faith will keep us from dying, or, if we die, faith will allow us still to live. This sounds rather confusing, even contradictory. But in both statements, Jesus is insisting that while death certainly threatens life, it has no power where there is faith. This might help us to see that he is talking about two kinds of life and two kinds of death.

First, those who believe in Jesus, even if they undergo physical death, will still enjoy a bond with him. In other words, they will live some kind of life. On the other hand, those who believe in him during this life will not suffer the dissolution of that life-giving bond. Mortal life will end with physical death, but physical death has no power over the life of union with Jesus. Jesus, who claims to be "the resurrection and the life," asks us, as he asked Martha, "Do you believe this?"

Ultimately, this story is about faith. Jesus stands at

the opening of the tomb and cries out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" This cry is intended for all of us. Jesus is summoning us all to come out of our tombs of unbelief so that he might unbind us. It is only when we come out of the tomb that we will receive the gift of eternal life. Do we believe enough to hear the voice of the Crucified and Risen One? His voice is never silent, but allows the power of his Spirit to give us life unceasingly. For this we give praise and thanks to the Father.

By faith, we know that death has no victory over anyone anymore.