

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

26th March 2023 - 5th Sunday of Lent

Readings (Year A): 1st: Ezekiel 37:12-14. 2nd: Romans 8:8-11. **Gospel:** John 11:1-45

The raising of Lazarus was the last great public sign given by Jesus. It was the decisive sign for the rejection or acceptance of faith in Jesus. Because he was working all these miraculous signs, the Jewish leaders made the decision that he would have to be killed.

The irony was not lost on John: it was because of his power over **life** that Jesus was sentenced to **death**. The story is used in the liturgy of this Sunday of Lent because it illustrates baptism as a dying and rising with Christ. The Easter Vigil, which is only 2 weeks away, will celebrate the glorious aspect of new life with Christ.

Restoring the dead to life was a miracle also associated with Elijah and Elisha and Peter and Paul.

What happened in all these instances was not resurrection but resuscitation or coming back to the same form of life. **Resurrection is not a coming back but a going forward to a new level of life beyond death.**

Christianity is a religion of death and life, of taking up the cross and following Christ. No writer has ever been as conscious of the Christian rhythm of dying and rising with Christ as St Paul. Some of his key texts are worth hearing.

Romans 6 is the classical statement of the double symbolism of baptismal water, meaning both death and life. *'You have been taught that when we were baptised in Christ Jesus we were baptised into his death, in other words when we were baptised we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life.'*

Philippians 3 is an expression of the deepest longing of Paul's life to be totally absorbed in the life and death of the Lord. *'All I want to know is Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share his sufferings by reproducing the pattern of his death.'*

It was the risen Lord who explained to the disciples on the road to Emmaus on the first Easter night, how it was necessary that the Christ should suffer and so enter into glory.

The death of Lazarus was necessary in its own way that the glory of God might be seen in his restoration. And it is necessary too for the Christian to die daily to sin and selfishness so as to live towards God in complete love. Do I ever remind you of the 'I' crossed out.

The climax of our participation in the Easter Vigil will be the baptism of new Christians, and the renewal of our own baptism around the Paschal candle of the risen Lord. This renewal should be a conscious, deliberate **Yes** to Christ who died and rose to life. When we say **Yes** to the resurrection we also say **Yes** to the cross.

Every time we are in a Catholic church the reminders are all there, the holy water as we enter, the altar of the cross and resurrection.

At every funeral the church reminds us that eternal life begins in baptism, so we are blessed as we come in with the words 'In the waters of baptism we died with Christ and rose to new life. May we now share with him eternal glory.' The symbols of baptism surround us, and we are blessed with the water as we finally leave.

Jesus asked one basic question of Martha after issuing his great promise: 'Do you believe this?' Her unhesitating answer I hope we too can make: **Yes Lord.**