

March 18, 2018

Ez 37:12-14; Rom 8:8-11; Jn 11:1-45

We have all seen many times those scenes in the movies where someone has a gun to someone's head and wants them to tell them what they want to know or they are going to kill them. It is a strong motivator. Life is a great good, and we go a long way to lengthen and preserve life. That time from conception to natural death is the period that we generally call our "life" - but Jesus shows us today that the definition of life is more than this. Our focus on preserving and lengthening our earthly life, can cause us to forget the full picture of what it means to live.

In the Gospel today when Jesus tells the disciples that Lazarus has died - that is his earthly physical life had ended - he uses a strange term. He says that he has "fallen asleep." Jesus uses this at other times like when the young girl dies and he says that she is asleep, and early Christian writings speak about saints who have been martyred as having fallen asleep. Why? Why not just say they died? This is meant to remind us that earthly, bodily life is not the full picture - there is something after death of the body that we awaken into. We hear in the second reading: *But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of righteousness.* St. Paul reminds us that there is a difference between death of the body and death of the spirit - that Christ brings us a life beyond the life of the body.

In the Gospel, Lazarus has suffered bodily death. They have had the funeral and buried him. Three days have passed, which means that he was good and dead - no coming back now. When Jesus arrives, all the people wonder why he could not have stopped Lazarus from bodily dying. Both of the sisters say the exact same thing when they see him: *Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.* The others say: *Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?* They all focus on prolonging the earthly life - they see Jesus as healer, as prolonger of bodily life, and he is - he even raised Lazarus to show that even he can bring back the guy they all thought was too far gone- his power to give life does not have a limit. But we can get so emotionally connected to our life on earth, so emotionally connected to our loved ones, our position, and our possessions, that we don't ever want this earthly life to end. Jesus understood this. As he begins to mourn Lazarus he is overcome by emotion - we hear the shortest verse in the scriptures *Jesus wept* - not

was sad, not he cried, he wept sobbing with emotion at the death of his friend. Jesus knows the pain we go through at the loss of loved ones, he knows what we fear about the end of this life.

Death of our body going to happen to all of us - but that is not it. If that was it then Jesus' power to give life has a limit, if that was it then we are fighting a battle to lengthen our lives that we are sure to lose, if that was it then life would be a constant and unstoppable march towards a loss of existence. But our spirit lives on after the body dies. Jesus raises Lazarus from bodily death as a symbol of what he brings. He wants to show that the death of the body is not the end - that his power to give life has no limit. That life that Jesus invites us to enter into in this life is one that does not end when our body falls asleep in death. Jesus says: *I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.* When he says "will never die" does not mean that the body will never die, it means that we can still be alive in spirit after our physical body dies. Since the spirit does not stop existing the words "dead" and "alive" in spirit don't mean whether our spirit exists or not, but rather the way it exists. Either with God in a heavenly union of love that completes all that we need as spiritual beings, or separated from God in a living death of incompleteness and perpetual aching for what we can't have, that we call hell. The one who believes and follows Jesus will be able to enter into "spiritual life" through Jesus "the resurrection and the life."

Life on earth is a good thing - Jesus shows us this by preserving bodily life and healing those who are sick - he even gives Lazarus a little more time on earth - but earthly life is not the most important thing. If we see earthly life as the most important thing - we are in for a certain let down - it is going to end whether we like it or not. God does not want the joy of earthly life to be tainted by the certainty of its end, this is why God gives us spiritual life through Jesus Christ - a life that does not end. Embracing this reality helps us to live more peacefully in this world, to not be so afraid of what people can do to us, to not have to be so fixated on making every moment count, to not have to wonder what will be the best part of our life and what will be the worst part. God assures us that the best part of our life is still yet to come. God says through the prophet: *O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them ... Then you shall know that I am the LORD ... I will put my spirit in you that you may live.* Jesus shows us that he is the source of the spiritual life the prophet spoke of - he is the "resurrection and the life" that conquers the grave so that we may live in heavenly peace with God for all eternity.