

Fr Dispin John - 5th Sunday of Lent 29/3/2020 Mitcham www.stjohnsmitcham.com.au:

Again, it feels a bit strange that I'm speaking to a camera. But I'm able to look beyond the eyes of this camera to the pews. If anyone happens to be walking past and happens to peek through, they might think this guy's crazy. He's talking by himself. I'm not hallucinating. I can see all of you here, sometimes in your usual places. I can see your faces, your smiles, and feel your presence here at this very moment. These days, more than ever, I wish to share with you not a theological dissertation or some kind of expert opinion on the gospel. And I'm not that good, I know that. But rather my reflections stemming from my prayers, my faith struggles, and sometimes even my frustration with my God.

Like today's first reading, which is so eerily relevant from the book of Ezekiel, where God says, "I am going to open your graves. I mean to raise you from your graves, my people." My problem is, why send us to the grave in the first place? And so when Jesus in the gospel says something similar, this illness is not going to end in death, but is for the glory of God, my problem is, why bring the illness in the first place? So instead of answering these questions, Jesus makes it even more complicated and even frustrating, when he learns that Lazarus, his friend, was unwell. Instead of going to see him, he chooses to stay where he was for two more days. It doesn't make sense. Jesus, if you truly love this man, why don't you drop everything and go and see him and save him? Instead of rushing, Jesus seems to take his own time. And that's my problem, too. But God is taking his own time, but sometimes it doesn't seem very fair.

So, one can understand in the gospel today, Martha's frustrations then, when she asked that question to Jesus. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. If only you had been here." In these days of fear and anxiety and uncertainty and even the fear of death, the gospel today tells us of somebody who has authority over diseases and death, somebody who can bring life out of total brokenness, and death and decay. And his name is Jesus. During these days, let us focus on the saving authority of God, through Jesus, which we will soon celebrate on Easter morning. You remember the famous valley of bones, of dry bones in the book of Ezekiel? But that is our first reading tonight, where God recreates his people out of death. The first reading today tells us of God's amazing power to raise us up even from dry bones. When he says, "I shall open your graves and raise you, Oh my people. I shall put my spirit in you, and you will live. I shall place you in your own land." The Lord has spoken and done this before.

And our prayer is, Lord, do it again. Do it again for us. We need to be reconstituted from our brokenness today. So many have lost their jobs. God, please reconstitute us from this brokenness. Many families have been forcibly separated from each other. Lord, bring us back together again as in old days. Many in our world and in our nation have been affected by this disease. Lord, come and reconstitute us to health and light. Just like you did Lazarus, just like you did to the dry bones, just like you calmed the scene and took the fear away. Bring us back to life. We need you more than ever. Just like you reassured Martha, reassure us today in our brokenness. Help us and touch us and say, "You will come out of this and I am with you." Please, Lord, don't let us live in this tomb forever. It is dark. It is frustrating. It is very frightful.

Lead us out of this darkness into your light and life so that we can go back and embrace our loved ones and celebrate you, our God again, as a community. Please unbind us. Unbind us and let us go free so that we can breathe again the freshness of life. Lead us out of this darkness. Help us to believe that your son Jesus is still the Lord. He is the Lord of your life. Lord, we need you. So friends, let us place our trust in the Lord again, our total trust. And together may we carry our crosses, so that we can be led to the resurrection of Jesus who is himself is life and the resurrection. Lord, I believe, and I choose to believe.