

Fifth Sunday of Lent “A” Cycle April 2, 2017

Like most ethnic groups, Jewish people use verbal expressions when offering a toast or a tribute. They use the word ‘l’heim’ which means ‘to life.’ The Scriptures for this Fifth Sunday of Lent are about God’s gift of life to his human creatures, not only physical life but also and, more importantly, spiritual life.

The prophet Ezekiel, in the first reading, describes a vision from the Lord of the slain Israelites being raised up and restored to life and to her own homeland, from which they had been exiled by the Babylonians.

In the second reading, Saint Paul also speaks life, a new life in the Holy Spirit as a gift won by Jesus for his disciples by his sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection.

The Gospel, from Saint John, narrates the story of Jesus’ raising of his dear friend Lazarus from the dead and giving him new life. This Gospel and the Gospels of the past two weekends about Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well and last week’s Gospel about his giving of sight to the blind man, have been used by the Church to instruct those preparing for the Easter sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist.

Those who come to faith in Jesus are refreshed by him just as water refreshes. They are given sight to follow Jesus as the true light of the world. Those who come to faith in Christ are given the sure hope of life in abundance leading to eternal life beyond natural death. As one preacher put it, if you ever get a better offer, take it!

As Jesus tells Martha, Lazarus’ sister in today’s Gospel: “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.” To demonstrate his teaching, Jesus asks to see where Lazarus has been entombed. He begins to cry, a sign of his true human nature that we all experience when someone close to us dies. Jesus then, by a simple command: “Lazarus, come out,” shows his power over death.

The next words of the Lord are important to the bystanders: “untie him and let him go free.” Jesus frees Lazarus from death and frees him to live as one of his disciples.

My friends, each of us here present, no matter how young or physically healthy, will eventually die. We know neither the day nor the hour. We do know, however, if we keep faith in Jesus, who raised Lazarus, and who himself conquered death, that we too will be raised up to eternal life. This is a consoling promise from the Lord. All he asks is that we be faithful to him and live by his teachings and example.

When people ask me how I am, that is how is my health, I tell them that I am getting old. When they respond that it is better than the alternative, I reply that I hope and firmly believe that the alternative, eternal life with the Lord, is much better.

All life needs support and nourishment. The Lord nurtures our life of faith with his Word of Scripture, with his sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist, which we celebrate now and often. This is Jesus’ offer of l’heim, to life, for which we are grateful.