**5th Sunday of Lent**

**St Patrick’s Cathedral**

**26th March, 2023**

                                                                                  [Ezek: 37:12-14](http://bible.oremus.org/?semico=yes&version=nrsvae&passage=Ezek%2037%3A12-14); [Ps 130:1-8](http://bible.oremus.org/?semico=yes&version=nrsvae&passage=Ps%20130%3A1-8); [Rom 8:8-11](http://bible.oremus.org/?semico=yes&version=nrsvae&passage=Rom%208%3A8-11); [John 11:1-45](http://bible.oremus.org/?semico=yes&version=nrsvae&passage=John%2011%3A1-45)

Previously called Passion Sunday, this Sunday marks the beginning of Passiontide, a deeper time of Lent, and we are mindful that we are drawing near to the end of Lent, as today’s Gospel clearly has Jesus’ passion and death in view. As we approach Holy Week, we see Jesus come closer to the climax of his life and mission.  As he comes near to Jerusalem, the setting for the final drama of his life, the threats of his enemies increase by the day.  They are rallying their forces to get rid of him once for all.

The disciples are quite aware of the situation and not very keen on going anywhere near Jerusalem.  They are quite alarmed.  Then, when Jesus says, “Let us go to Judea” they remind him that the last time he was there, the Jews wanted to stone him.  “Are you going back there again?”

Jesus lets them know that fear and danger cannot be the deciding factors in his life and mission.

This event in today’s Gospel is the last of the miracles of Jesus recorded in St John’s Gospel. It was the crowning glory of the many “signs” recorded by John.  It is the miracle that must be remembered every time death seems to still be in charge.  Mature faith enables a believer to face physical death knowing that eternal life is not just a promise of resurrection but is also a present and continuing participation in the life of the ever-living Jesus.

When Lazarus emerged from the tomb, the last Passover was near, as was the crucifixion. What better time to be reminded of the power and glory of God than when we face a major trial, a time of crisis and suffering?  Next Sunday is Palm Sunday, and I hope you will be able to participate in the Holy Week ceremonies.  These days are a time to acknowledge the suffering that is a part of life.  But acknowledging those things also make us better able to believe the truth of God’s love and majesty and power, and the joy of the resurrection, enables us to hold strong in the faith.

The actual raising of Lazarus seems almost an anti-climax.  It is expressed in the briefest language and there are many questions we might have asked, such as: what did he look like? how did he walk?  what did he say? -  which are simply not answered.  The gospel wants us to focus on the central ‘sign’, which only confirms what Jesus had said of himself:

 *“I AM the resurrection and the life”.*

It is the fulfilment of the prophecy from Ezekiel in today’s First Reading.  This reading is part of the famous parable of the valley full of dead bones which are brought to life, a parable about Israel, dead in sin and idolatry, being brought back to life in God.  In today’s gospel, Lazarus represents all those who are being brought back to life, life in God.  He represents especially all those who are brought into new life by baptism, sharing the very life of God.

Along with the gospels of the last two Sundays (the Samaritan Woman and the Man Born Blind), this reading is directed at those preparing for Baptism at Easter and us who are invited to renew our baptismal promises at Easter.  Baptism, as St Paul tells us, is both a dying to one’s past and an entry into new life.  The newly baptised person is “a new person” with a new life.

For us already baptised, we can do well to reflect on how much we have continued to see that life growing in us.  That is the theme of Paul in the Second Reading.  Those whose lives are embedded in the “flesh”, that is, those whose lives are given over to their instincts of greed and self-indulgence, can never be close to God.  They have no room for God.

Those who are in the Spirit will want to give their whole selves to the higher instincts of truth, love, compassion, sharing and justice.  When we are full of that Spirit then we have truly risen with Christ for his life is truly active in us.  We are both alive and life-giving.

*I live, no, it is not I, but Christ who lives in me.*

So, our Gospel reading of the “Raising of Lazarus” is well known and the story is very familiar to us. It speaks of faith, trust, hope, and life. It shows us what Ezekiel believed in: faithfulness and the awesome power of God to breathe life back into and restore our mortal bodies. It also exemplifies what we read from Paul today to the Romans. “That if you are not in the spirit, but only in the flesh, then you cannot please God, but through Jesus Christ the Spirit dwells within you, and if the Spirit of Christ dwells within you, then He who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise your mortal bodies.” This is a time to re-unite our mortal selves to the Spirit that has been suppressed within us by the worldly desires that have consumed us.

Just yesterday, we celebrated the Solemnity of the “Annunciation of the Lord”. This was an opportunity to renew our hope in the God who was sending us the Messiah incarnate.

This is the high point of human history as we Christians understand it. With that unconditional acceptance of God’s will for her, in that moment, the new life began in the womb of Mary. It is the moment of Incarnation, the moment of God becoming a member of the human family and making God visible in a special way in our world.

Mary gave her unconditional ‘Yes’ to God’s request and that is her glory. But it does not stop there because it is clear that Mary never for a moment took back that ‘Yes’. She implemented it through all the experiences she would have in the years to come, some of them difficult and painful. And, most painful of all, she stood at the foot of the Cross faithful to her Son to the very end. Today, in this final phase of the Lenten season, we walk with Mary as her sons and daughters.

Mary will not be much mentioned during this week’s readings, but she will be there, nonetheless. She will be present for her Son, and she will be there for us, too. When we accompany Mary through this week, she will show us how to remain steadfast in our faith even when our universe is shaken. She will show us how to cling to God’s will even when we feel abandoned. She will show us how to love even when our hearts are being torn apart.

She will lead us to the Foot of the Cross and will show us how to await the Resurrection.