

Lent 5th Sunday (A)

2nd April 2017

'Hints of resurrection'

Ezek 37: *I shall raise you from your graves, my people.*

Ps 129: *If you, O Lord, were to mark our guilt, who would survive?*

Rom 8: *He who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also.*

Jn 11: 1–45: the raising of Lazarus

Today we have heard the third of the three long Gospel passages from St John: a third encounter of Jesus which allows Him to reveal Himself and so to deepen faith. In the previous weeks, first the Samaritan woman, and then the man born blind, at least recognise *“I see you are a prophet, sir,”* but Jesus Himself has to say to them that He is the Messiah: *“I who am speaking to you, I AM He.”* But here He is amongst friends, Martha, Mary & Lazarus. And Martha already feels in her heart: *“You are the Christ, the Son of God, the One who was to come into this world.”*

As we move towards the end of Lent and enter Passiontide, let's use this passage, as in previous weeks, to examine our consciences, especially taking note of anything we should bring to Confession before Easter:

1. Hospitality. The first thing we note is the tender care that Martha & Mary take of Jesus. Even as He enters this troubling time as He approaches His Passion, they give Him a

homely welcome. What about us? Are there any people/friends/relations whom we should be offering some hospitality to? Anyone we have neglected there?

2. Mary & Martha had lost their brother, Lazarus, and were still caught up in the grief of his death. Our Lord comes into this situation of loss, and brings His divinity, His authority, and His compassion to bear. First, we must ask ourselves how we care for the dying. Do we make sure that we give extra attention to those whose lives are coming towards their end. We may have fears about death, but those who are dying need our love & presence more than ever.
3. Also: we need to ask ourselves if we are giving the right care for the bereaved. Supporting those who have lost a loved one takes time and can't be rushed; it demands patience and faithful love. Is there anyone we've neglected in this regard?
4. Finally, as we hear Martha make her Proclamation of Faith, and yet still have the doubts arising as Jesus asks for the tomb to be unsealed, we might ask ourselves about how we proclaim our faith. It's not wrong to have doubts — Martha is a saint of the Church! — but we also need to accept and speak of the evidence that the Gospels place before us: all these signs of Jesus being the Son of God, which are historically true, and not just an opinion to take or leave.

Jesus's raising of Lazarus must have increased Martha's faith, and indeed many others came to believe in Him with this miracle. This resuscitation of Lazarus back to life is a sign of the coming glorious Resurrection of Jesus Himself. But it is a good reminder that *even now* (even in this life — not just after death) Jesus can start to raise us up. He does this by raising us up out of our sins. In fact, how can we rise again at the last day if we have not let Jesus raise us up here on earth? Let's take courage from the spiritual life which Jesus is offering us: to raise us up and on to our feet, leaving the bandages of our sins behind. Let's have Jesus say to us in Confession those happy words, *Unbind him, let him go free!*