

Fifth Sunday in Lent (A)

April 6, 2014.

Untie him and let him go (Jn. 11:44)

As we continue our Lenten observances of prayer, penance and spiritual renewal, on this fifth Sunday in Lent the Gospel proclaims the resurrection of Lazarus; and we are faced with the ultimate mystery of our existence. *I am the resurrection and the life...Do you believe this? (Jn. 11:25-26)*. With Martha we also place our faith and hope in Jesus our Saviour: *Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world (Jn. 11:27)*. This act of faith which we make individually and collectively establishes us in a communion with Christ our Saviour in *this* life. Consequently, we make a serious and purposeful commitment to Christian discipleship that prepares us to overcome the barrier of death not only at the moment of death but even as we live our lives here and now; for faith in the resurrection of the dead and the hope of eternal life open our eyes the ultimate meaning of human existence. God created us for resurrection and life; and this truth gives an authentic and definitive meaning to human history, to the personal and social lives of men and women, to culture, to politics and the economy. This is the culture of life. Without the light of faith, the entire universe finishes shut within a tomb, devoid of any future, any hope. This, by contrast, is the culture of death.

We have then a definitive perspective on human existence and this perspective encompasses the totality of who we are and who we become for life, we well know, is not static. Christian life is a journey into the mystery of God Himself. This is how Blessed John Henry Newman described the dynamic nature of our Christian life: *Christ himself vouchsafes to repeat in each of us in figure and in mystery all that He did and suffered in the flesh. He is formed in us, born in us, suffers in us, rises again in us, lives in us....We are ever receiving our birth, our justification, our renewal, ever dying to sin, ever rising to righteousness* (Sermon 10, "Righteousness Not of Us, But in Us" in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, p. 1048). These words capture the nature and purpose of our Christian commitment and because of this truth we affirm the beauty and purpose of life, of sacrifice of suffering, for all these contribute to our transformation in Christ. In this process nature and grace work in concert and we experience the truth of our Lord's own words: *Live in me, and I in you (Jn. 15:4)*. God is present in our joys and in our sorrows, in our life and even in our death, when it comes. Every stage of our human life has been sanctified and consecrated by the presence of the Son of God.

In our times perhaps no other person taught us these truths in word and through the example of his life especially his later years, than Blessed John Paul II. His accomplishments during one of the longest and richest teaching pontificates in history are manifold. On April 27th, he will be canonized in Rome, together with Blessed John XXIII. Some of you may have a living memory of Blessed John XXIII; most of us probably saw Blessed John Paul II when he visited Canada. Some of you may also remember the day of his papal election, when he emerged on the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica and said, *Be not afraid! Open wide the doors for Christ!* The very first thing he did was to reaffirm the simplest and oldest Christian confession of faith; a confession we make every Sunday and which we ourselves have just made our very own in the reading of the Gospel. It is our belief in the Resurrection. *Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world (Jn. 11:27)*. In his first encyclical he stated: *Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of man, is the centre of the universe and of*

history (Redemptor hominis, 1). “The opening paragraph of Redemptor hominis deliberately evokes the beginning of the Communist Manifesto, bluntly contradicting Marxism’s man-made, self-destructive salvation through violent revolution.... John Paul II had firsthand experience of the destructive ideologies that did not understand the human person. He was unshakably convinced that [as the Second Vatican Council taught], only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.... Christ...by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear (Gaudium et Spes, 22)” (Michelle K. Borrás, “Five Essential Insights of Pope John Paul II” in *Columbia Magazine*, April, 2014, p.14-15). That supreme calling is a share in God’s own life by grace here and now and eternal life. This is why Blessed John Paul fearlessly defended the dignity of the human person. He wrote: *The Gospel of God’s love for man, the Gospel of the dignity of the person and the Gospel of life are a single and indivisible Gospel (Evangelium Vitae, 2). The God whom we adore is the God of the living.*

Untie him and let him go (Jn. 11:44). Though these words were spoken by our Lord of Lazarus, they are no less applicable to you and me personally and to all of humanity collectively. In Lazarus we can see humanity freed and no longer bound by the finality and darkness of the tomb. All that we are and become in the course of our earthly life has value and meaning and purpose. Jesus is the Lord of history, *the one who was to come into this world* precisely because each human person is of infinite value; and that is why in choosing to live life with our ultimate purpose in mind we become one with the disciples of Christ our Lord throughout history and with our Jewish brothers and sisters in building the culture of life. This is the culture that sees the protection of persons in their moral, intellectual and spiritual development as the defining goals of society; namely, our daily lives, education, culture, politics, and the economy.

Evidently, not everyone sees it this way but we do and we must be clear about this. It is necessary, absolutely necessary for us to live as we think, lest we end up thinking as we live. This is to say that when we allow ourselves to be influenced by the spirit of the world we risk losing our way. Our Lord has chosen us to be the light of the world but this privilege is not without cost. *If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you (Jn. 15: 19-20).* We all remember the attempt on the life of Blessed John Paul II; and perhaps each one of us has experienced in some way the cost of fidelity to the truth, to the Gospel of life. Where do we draw our strength? From the one who has conquered sin and death, hatred and unbelief. *In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (Jn. 16:33).*

As we prepare to celebrate Holy Week and the Paschal Triduum, soon to be upon us, the sacred liturgy of this fifth Sunday in Lent reminds us that the resurrection of Jesus Christ from dead, which the resurrection of Lazarus prefigures, is the event that gives ultimate meaning to our human existence; and not only our existence but also to our suffering and even most especially to our death. In Christ Crucified and Risen is manifested the power of God and His love for us His children. *For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it gain: this charge I have received*

from my Father (Jn. 10: 17:18). His victory is our victory and the truth and splendour of His resurrection enlighten our lives now and even and most especially, at the hour of our death.

I am who am and my counsel is not with the wicked, but my delight is in the law of the Lord. I have asked my Father. He has given me the nations for an inheritance. I lay down and slept and I rose up again, for the Lord sustained me. Those who pray the traditional Divine Office will recognise these words which some composers have beautifully set to music (Cf. Andrea Gabrieli, Motet: *Ego sum qui sum*).* They are the antiphons that accompany the first prayers of Easter Sunday. They summarise the truth we profess: *Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of man, is the centre of the universe and of history (Redemptor hominis, 1). Christ yesterday and today, the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega. All time belongs to Him and all the ages (Lucernarium, The Easter Vigil, The Roman Missal).* This Saviour, the Lord of history *is not far from each one of us, for 'In Him we live and move and have our being...for we are indeed his offspring' (Acts 17:28).* His presence is at once cosmic and intimate. Our Saviour sustains each one of us. May He strengthen us to sustain one another.

**(Ego sum qui sum, et consilium meum non est cum impiis, sed in lege Domini voluntas mea est. Postulavi Patrem meum: dedit mihi gentes in hereditatem. Ego dormivi, et somnum coepi et exsurrexi, quoniam Dominus suscepit me. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGdHJbsyBXA>).*