

5th Sunday of Lent, 29 March 2020.

With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption

Dear brothers and sisters, Last Sunday's readings presented us with themes of light and seeing beyond the appearance. Seeing beyond the appearance is seeing as God sees. This form of seeing is faith and is a supernatural gift of God. It enables us to see things in their right perspective. Ultimately, seeing with the eyes of faith enables us to know, to love and to worship Jesus as the Messiah.

The goal of revelation of God in the Scripture and sacred Tradition is salvation. The gospel according to St John put it succinctly, "these are written that you may [come to] believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). Jesus is indispensable because with him there is mercy and fullness of redemption. This Sunday, we shall dwell on this theme, With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption. What is the greatest example of the Lord's mercy and fullness of redemption? It is the gift of the resurrection. Believing in Jesus and patterning one's life accordingly makes one a beneficiary of this awesome gift. The Apostle Paul reminds us of this when he writes, "If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give

life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit dwelling in you" (Romans 8:11).

This Sunday's readings speak of life and resurrection. The first reading comes from the passage on the vision of the Valley of dry bones in the days of exile. These bones, which the Lord brought to life, symbolize the houses of Israel and Judah and all the human race. The Lord said, "Look! I am going to open your graves; I will make you come up out of your graves, my people, and bring you back to the land of Israel" (Ezekiel 37:12). Describing what that meant the Lord said, "I will put my spirit in you that you may come to life, and I will settle you in your land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord. I have spoken; I will do it" (Ezekiel 37:14). The people in exile were dead in the sense of losing their ancestral heritage and identity. The Lord assured them of their return and of bringing them back to life. This life points to a life beyond this world. It points to heaven which is our true homeland. But heaven came in the person of Jesus. Jesus is heaven. To be in Jesus is to enter heaven. The Lord made this clear when he said, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me will never die" (John 1: 25).

Here the first reading and the gospel come together. The promise of bringing his people back to their ancestral home was fulfilled in the return of the Israelites from Babylon. But this points to the greater return, a return from the land of the dead to the land of the living. The raising of the young Lazarus was a

testimony to this. He had been in the tomb for four days.¹ This means that Lazarus completely died, yet our Lord raised him from death. Jesus did this by the power of his life-giving word, just as when he spoke a word and the water changed into wine at the wedding at Cana of Galilee. The raising of Lazarus to life is the seventh and the apex of the seven signs in the Gospel according to John.² This sign portrays our Lord as the Messiah who has the power over life and death. This sign like the rest shows that Jesus is mercy and redemption. Returning life to Lazarus marked a watershed in the readiness of the civil and religious authorities to kill Jesus. Jesus' life was sought because he restored someone back to life. Jesus knew what was coming but did not hold back from raising up Lazarus. Resurrection is a gift of mercy because no one merits it on their own. It is the redemption because the Lord gave his own life for it. It is the end of all ends.

The raising of Lazarus is a token of the life that Jesus gives. Later, at the appointed time, Lazarus still died. But the life Jesus gives through his death and resurrection lasts forever. He showed this in his own resurrection. Pope Benedict XVI put it this way, “Jesus’ Resurrection was about breaking out into an entirely new form of life, into a life that is no longer subject to

¹ According to St Augustine being dead and buried symbolizes one who is dead in sin. The other raising of the dead our Lord performed in the gospel are raising of Julius daughter and the son of the woman of Nain.

² Other signs are the transforming of water into wine, cure of the royal official’s son ([Jn 4:46–54](#)) the healing of the paralytic at the pool with five porticoes, walking on water, multiplication of loaves, opening the eyes of the man born blind. These reveal Jesus as the Messiah.

the law of dying and becoming, but lies beyond it – a life that opens up a new dimension of human existence.”³

What shall we draw from all this? There are many things. The Lord Jesus is the Messiah. He has power to do all things. In this period when death stares us in the face every day as a result of the corona virus pandemic, may we remember that God is the one who delivers us from death.

The ultimate message of the raising Lazarus from death, like the rest of the six signs is to instill faith in God and to assure us of eternal life. When the Lord announced the death of Lazarus to his Apostles, he added, "I am glad for you that I was not there, that you may believe" (John 11:15). One also sees this ironically in the action of the scribes and pharisees who became worried because of the miracle our Lord performed by raising a dead person to life. Together they said, "If we leave him alone everybody will believe in him" (John 11:48).

What shall we do? "My sheep hear my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28). May we hear the voice of Jesus and follow him. "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to

³ Benedict XVI, Jesus of Nazareth, Holy Week: From Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), p.244.

separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"
(Romans 8:38-39).