



Peace be with you. Many years ago, I volunteered at a hospital in Daly City, on the outskirts of San Francisco. My work was in the evenings at times when much of the hospital was closed: the executive offices, the department heads were gone. In my work, one area of the hospital that I passed was down on the lowest level of the hospital. Can you guess what it was? Yes, it was the morgue – and it was unmistakable when you came close enough to it.... Not to be bringing up things most of us don't like to think about – but that area had an odor about it – it was the early odor of death. If you have ever smelled death – you know how utterly unpleasant – how terribly sickening the smell can become.

Firemen... policemen.... Chaplains who have been to accident scenes – they know about this... If you're a CSI TV program junkie like I am – you know that they will put on special masks and Vicks Vapo Rub under their nostrils. In real life – and on TV drama shows, they do this as they come close and remove or pray over remains of a long-deceased person.

Again this week – we have an epic (and yes another long) story from Holy Scripture. In that desert climate, is it any wonder that Jesus would hear words of protest about rolling the stone back? Imagine the faces of those around Jesus.... 'Is he crazy?' But Jesus seems such a commanding figure -- this Jesus who just shortly before was emotionally upset – now he yells: "Lazarus, Come Out!"

Like a riveting movie or TV drama, the moment must have been tense... Well – we who have heard this Gospel today – and in years past – we know the outcome... we know of the power of God in Jesus... What can we see in our mind's eye from these readings? The followers of Jesus – some hopeful... some saying 'it's too late in this case...' Jesus with the power of God to overcome the effects of death... letting those present there – and us know He will open our graves... Do these inspired words and stories give us hope? Most assuredly they do...

Think of Jesus weeping.... Jesus who knows there is an after-life for us... that same Jesus has such compassion for the sufferings and struggles when we lose someone we love... I don't know about you – I am so comforted knowing that Jesus fully shares in the pain that we experience in the death of our loved ones.... That Jesus will walk the walk of loving friendship with us in these times...

For each of us – there is the hope and the promise of God... the promise that says that when I cross over – at that moment when my heart cannot beat another beat – there is the faith and the expectation that I will hear, that you will hear the same words that Lazarus heard.... Thomas... come out.... Helen... cross over... William.... Take my hand and come to me.... Ah... what beautiful hope is given to us who remain in the Spirit.

Recently, I was listening to one of the Protestant radio music and talk shows.... They read an email from a young teenage girl.

In her email, she wrote in that she had recently found the Lord.... she was committing her life to Jesus... but she said... since God is love... since Jesus gave His life for our sins... how could God send anyone to hell? I think a lot of the world has signed up for this sort of thinking... Our second reading today answers this... "But you are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you." If we are of the spirit, how do our lives differ from those who live according to the flesh? We need to ask ourselves if we live and act any different than the world – because (at large), the world lives not in the Spirit at all. Would our children or our spouse or anyone see us as living in the Spirit of God? Or would they describe you as a nice person... a very nice person? Jesus wasn't a nice person... Jesus was a critic of the times... a challenger of status quo... Jesus called his followers to a radical new way of life....

Here are some other thoughts.... We can think of our sins as something demonstrated by the death experience in today's Gospel. Sin causes a certain kind of darkness in us... sin is hidden... sin is a cause a step-by-step loss of God's life inside of us... Or in the case of major sin – God's grace is immediately cut off from us. And let the world not mislead us, there is no sin that is just harmless little sin!

The Lazarus story tells us – reminds us that nothing can be hidden from God... and no matter how deadly the sin – Jesus desires to approach and overcome the effects of the sin. Jesus isn't worried about the stench of sin...

I would like to conclude with a story: a close friend has been a deacon for over 30 years. His name is Deacon Ron and he lives in near full retirement outside of the Denver area. One day after he finished leading a Communion Service, a woman came into the sacristy and said she needed to talk to him right away. He didn't know the woman at all. Deacon Ron said he had to go somewhere and he couldn't stay to talk to her. She kept pushing and he finally made an appointment to see her after a service the next morning, but only for 30 minutes. So the next morning, as the lady came in to talk to Ron, he said, "I'm sorry -- I have to be some place in about an hour -- but I can give you 30 minutes... So let's get started."

Haltingly, the woman said to Ron... "My problem is I can seem to find a man to be in a relationship with that lasts..." And she stopped... expecting something... I don't know what from Deacon Ron... When Ron told me of this experience -- he said that he prayed a quick silent prayer for guidance. And then something came upon him... He went with that insight and guidance... and so he said to her, "Have you ever been pregnant with a child and terminated that pregnancy other than in normal child birth?" The woman gasped.... Slowly, tears filled her eyes... she started to sob.... Yes -- she had been pregnant fifteen years earlier... she had had an abortion... and she had never told anyone about it... Ron stayed as long as he could, giving her the compassion and hope and direction she had not experienced before.

Ron is not Jesus... Deacon Ron couldn't hear the woman's confession.

But from what I heard in that story – I believe that the power of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit led Ron to ask that woman the question that he asked... The stench of that horrendous sin was overcome beginning at that moment. And she was on her way to become a resurrected woman... a woman who would again be radiant and fragrant in the eyes of her Lord...

That is the power of Jesus – rolling back the rock that hides our failings... I hope you had a chance to go to Confession – the sacrament of Reconciliation... if not – I hope you will go before Easter... join with Jesus in a resurrection that frees each of us from the death of sin.

God bless you... and love you.... and keep you.

Reading 1

Ez 37:12-14

Thus says the Lord GOD: O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them, and bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and have you rise from them, O my people! I will put my spirit in you that you may live, and I will settle you upon your land; thus you shall know that I am the LORD. I have promised, and I will do it, says the LORD.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

R. (7) With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; LORD, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive to my voice in supplication.

R. With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.

If you, O LORD, mark iniquities, LORD, who can stand?

But with you is forgiveness, that you may be revered.

R. With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.

I trust in the LORD; my soul trusts in his word. More than sentinels wait for the dawn, let Israel wait for the LORD.

R. With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.

For with the LORD is kindness and with him is plenteous redemption;

And he will redeem Israel from all their iniquities.

R. With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.

Reading II

Rom 8:8-11

Brothers and sisters: Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit,

if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever does not have the

Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although

the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of

righteousness. 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.

Gospel

Jn 11:1-45 or 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45

Now a man was ill, Lazarus from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who had anointed the Lord with perfumed oil and dried his feet with her hair; it was her brother Lazarus who was ill.

So the sisters sent word to him saying, "Master, the one you love is ill." When Jesus heard this he said, "This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

So when he heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place where he was. Then after this he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just trying to stone you, and you want to go back there?"

Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in a day? If one walks during the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks at night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." He said this, and then told them, "Our friend Lazarus is asleep, but I am going to awaken him." So the disciples said to him, "Master, if he is asleep, he will be saved." But Jesus was talking about his death, while they thought that he meant ordinary sleep.

So then Jesus said to them clearly, "Lazarus has died. And I am glad for you that I was not there, that you may believe. Let us go to him."

So Thomas, called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go to die with him." When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, only about two miles away. And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise." Martha said to him, "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus told her, "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. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world."

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary secretly, saying, "The teacher is here and is asking for you." As soon as she heard this, she rose quickly and went to him. For Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still where Martha had met him. So when the Jews who were with her in the house comforting her saw Mary get up quickly and go out, they followed her, presuming that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her weeping, he became perturbed and deeply troubled, and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Sir, come and see." And Jesus wept. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him."

But some of them said, "Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?" So Jesus, perturbed again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay across it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him, "Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus raised his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me." And when he had said this, He cried out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, "Untie him and let him go." Now many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he had done began to believe in him.