

I am the Resurrection and the Life (Sunday, April 10, 2011)

Today's Gospel reading is very familiar to the Christian community. We use it every three years on this 5th Sunday of Lent and often in the other years as well since it suggested whenever we have Catechumens. Making it even more familiar is the fact that we often use it for wake or funeral liturgies.

Leo Osip's family requested it for his wake,
as did the family of Clovis Spencer for his wake
and the family of Ike Waddell for his.

May those three men rest in peace.

The reading is familiar but why do we choose it?

Our intuition takes us in the direction that many commentators have gone, namely, this is one of the most powerful readings in Scripture.

It is powerful because it is about death.

It is powerful because it is about miracles.

It is powerful because it shows that Jesus is not just a holy compassionate person, not just a prophet, but truly God.

This story about Lazarus is the third of three Gospel stories that show Jesus' power over death.

First, there is the daughter of Jairus, a 12 year old girl.

Her story is recorded in all three Synoptic gospels: Matt, Mark and Luke.

Her story begins with her being ill and her father, Jairus, asks for Jesus' help.

While Jairus speaks with Jesus, people come and tell Jairus that his daughter has died.

Jesus goes to the girl and, in front of her parents and three apostles, he takes her by the hand and brings her back to life.

The skeptic or doubter within us would say "Oh, she was not really dead yet."

Of course, we would have to admit in all humility, that even back 2000 years ago people pretty well knew when someone was dead or not dead.

Second, Luke records the gospel story of Jesus and the son of the widow of Naim.

In this story the dead young man is being carried in a funeral procession to his tomb.

By customs of that day, he has been dead less than 24 hours.

Jesus is sorry for the widow because now she will be truly destitute without a son to support her.

Again, a simple touch of the Lord's hand and the young man sits up on the stretcher.

For the skeptic or doubter within us we do have to note that the man was quite dead.

They were carrying him to his tomb.

Today's story about Lazarus is even more dramatic.

Lazarus not only had died,

had not only been carried to a tomb,

but had been in the tomb for four days.

Here, just the very words of Jesus, "Lazarus, come out!" are enough to bring the miracle of resurrection, new life.

Three stories – each one showing a higher miraculous power of Jesus.

Death and rebirth! How marvelous!

So:

Are these miracles having any impact on us today?

Do they renew our hopes?

Do they bolster our faith in the Lord?

Are they fostering our charitable thoughts and actions to others?

Am I any different than when I came here today?

For those coming into the Church through the RCIA, are these miracles nourishing your budding faith in Jesus?

After all, these stories have real significance for you and me.

Life does not end but continues. Jesus says to Martha:

"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?"

That was the challenge from Jesus to Martha.

Martha replied:

"Yes, Lord, I have come to believe that you are the Christ,
The Son of God, the one who is coming into the world."

That was Martha's reply.

What is my reply? Yours?

Can we believe what Jesus is saying here in the Gospel?

Has our faith grown that strong?

Can we repeat the words of our Sunday Mass Creed with confidence?

“We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”

Or as we say in the Apostles’ Creed:

“I believe in ... the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.”

Those have been the thoughts, words and beliefs of Christians for almost 2000 years.

Why have we believed this?

We could say, “Well, the evidence is there.”

“Jesus brought 3 people back to life.”

Yes, but evidence only informs our knowledge.

Belief takes us further.

Belief depends on trust.

A wise man has said: “Belief is rooted in a trusting relationship.”

“Belief is rooted in a trusting relationship.”

[Frank Ponnet; Worship Director; ...parish in Pasadena, California]

Now we are getting to the real question!

How is our relationship with the Lord coming along?

Is it far enough along that we can truly trust in him? In his words? His promises?

How is our life long conversion coming along?

Have we grown close enough to the Lord that we can trust him with our life?

... that we can trust him with our death?

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