



March 26, 2023
Fifth Sunday of Lent

"O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them..."
Ezekiel 37:12



Dear Friends,

In an article, *In Search of Solace: A pastor who lost his son to cancer probes the problem of pain*, Randall Gauger speaks of the profound grief that he and his wife Linda endured. Their son Matt had been diagnosed with and aggressive lymphoma. They would lose their 22-year-old son. They felt numb and asked the questions we all do: how can this be happening? Why God? Randall tells us, *"But being in that room where he left us and hearing him speak of things he was seeing and feeling—things of heaven and eternity—changed us forever...for a few hours we glimpsed through him the other side of that door we will all go through one day."*

The reading from Ezekiel and the Gospel of John are addressed to communities facing crises. Ezekiel writes from exile in Babylon. One hundred years before the Kingdom of Israel and its ten tribes were conquered and scattered by the Assyrians. Ezekiel, a priest of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, writes to the two surviving tribes. They had lost everything, their land, and their king; would they also lose their faith in God?

Ezekiel has a famous vision where God tells him to prophesy over a desert filled with dry bones. God will restore Israel killed and taken into exile. The life-giving breath and spirit of God will restore Israel again. Only God who is faithful can restore them to life.

The community of John's Gospel like other early Christian communities experience a great crisis every time a believer dies. If Jesus gave us eternal life, why must we still die? Martha represents the community with its real but inadequate faith: *"Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died."* In other words, if Jesus had not left in his ascension, he would still be here, and believers wouldn't die. After all, did Jesus not say that whatever he asks of God would be given to him?

Jesus must correct these misunderstandings. He is indeed *"the resurrection and the life."* But resurrection does not mean the restoration of a corpse. It is rather a transformation of life. The eternal life that Jesus gives his followers does not abolish death but rather transcends it. To believe this firmly is the challenge posed to us whenever a loved one dies. Through Martha, Jesus challenges each of us *"Do you believe this?"* Her response is the perfect answer, *"Yes Lord, I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."*

The raising of Lazarus is only a sign that points to the real transformation of the resurrection. In his grief for his friend Lazarus, Jesus accompanies us in our own many losses and tragedies. In his death Jesus leads us to a new and transformed reality. In our baptism we begin to share in his dying and rising to new life.

Faith in the risen Jesus is not fully developed until it enables a believer to face physical death with the firm faith that we possess eternal life now, not just in the future. Resurrection is sharing the life of the ever-living Jesus now in this very moment. Those who believe in Jesus will never truly die because he lives in them now. *"Bring your sorrow and watch for the sunrise of resurrection...Hope is reborn, and life finds new beginning."*—Frances J Roberts.

Peace,

Fr Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.anne.church