



**March 17, 2024**

**Fifth Sunday of Lent (Cycle A)**

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



Dear Friends;

Too often we want easy answers to questions about life. We do not want to have to wrestle with complexities. That takes too much time. We are already busy enough. We do not have the time to contemplate the implications of our belief systems. Until we run into life situations that don't fit into our current understanding. Sometimes we find if we are open, we reconsider what we thought was true and come to new insights.

Our ancestors in faith were no different. The Bible is a record of how our understanding and relationship with God changes over time. The early faith life of ancient Israel was rather simple. The Kingdom of God was the land God gave Israel. As a descendant of Abraham your inheritance was the property given to you by your ancestors. If you observed the Law of Moses, you would have a long life surrounded by your children and grandchildren. When you died you were dead you might live on in your descendants.

Early Israel believed that the LORD of Israel was their one God. But other places and peoples had the gods of their lands. When the people were carried off to exile in Babylon their ideas about God are challenged. They ask, *"How can they sing praise to God in a foreign land?"* They were like dead people in this place cut off from the land of their ancestors. They begin to realize that the God of Israel is bigger. He is the God of all the universe.

Even though they are cut off from the land, the God who created the world, who liberated them from Egypt and settled them in the promise land, this same God can restore them. Ezekiel uses the image of God opening their graves and bring them back home. Ezekiel means the grave of exile from which the people will be liberated. But this idea will develop into the hope of resurrection from physical death for all the righteous. This is a new insight.

By the time of Jesus many groups within Judaism, like the Pharisees, believe in the resurrection of the righteous. They come to that conclusion because God is just, and God is faithful. Many righteous people died without the reward of their goodness. Many had died because they remained faithful to the Law. Their lives cry out to God for justice. Resurrection is the response of a just God. Jesus shared this belief.

This is the faith that Martha expresses to Jesus, *"I know my brother will rise again on the last day."* But it is an inadequate faith, *"If you had been here my brother would not have died."* Martha, like us, have questions when our loved ones die. Faith in the risen Jesus is not fully developed until it enables a believer to face physical death with the *present possession of eternal life* not just in the future. That life is found *now* in a continuing share in the life of the risen Lord. *"I am the resurrection and the life those who believe in me never truly die."*

Jesus asks Martha (and us) *"Do you believe this?"* She responds, *"Yes Lord, I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the one coming into the world."* Her profession of faith is a personal response to Jesus who reveals himself as resurrection and life. All this happens before Jesus raises her brother. Her faith does not depend upon seeing her brother raised. Life and eternal life flow from our relationship with Christ, whether we live or die we are the Lord's. Faith does not rest on proof but on trust. We trust in the faithfulness of the God of Jesus.

Peace,

*Fr Ron*

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