



Dear Folks,

Looking at the cycle A readings, today we come to the story of the raising of Lazarus, which is about the middle of the Gospel of John, and the last and greatest of His signs (John does not talk about “miracles” but rather “signs”).

There is a big difference from mere physical survival and the fullness of life. “A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10).”

Our second reading from Romans 8 says, “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 (Romans 8:8-10).” It is worth reading a bit of what came before: “...so the righteous decree of the law might be fulfilled in us, who live not according to the flesh but according to the spirit. For those who live according to the flesh are concerned with the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the spirit with the things of the spirit. The concern of the flesh is death, but the concern of the spirit is life and peace (Romans 8:4-6).”

It is crucial to understand that when talking about “flesh” and “spirit” the Bible is not saying the body is evil or unimportant. It is talking about an attitude, an approach to life. To live according to the flesh is to be ruled by our lesser desires, and to live according to the spirit is to live according to the truth of God, which can only be done with God’s grace. St. Paul famously taught: “Now the works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. In contrast the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law (Galatians 5:19-23).”

To live according to the flesh is to be ruled by our desires as animals are. For animals, of course, it is fitting. They are engaged in a fight for survival that always ends in defeat. We were made for more, and to settle for the desires of the flesh is to make of our lives a grotesque caricature of what God made us to be. A violent rage and desire for revenge are grotesque caricatures of the desire to build peace and justice. Greed is a grotesque caricature of the desire to build things of benefit to others, enjoy the fruits of our labors, and have some security for the future. Lust is a grotesque caricature of the free, total, faithful and fruitful relationships to which God calls us. Pride is a grotesque caricature of the desire to celebrate and rejoice in the person that God has made us. To live according to the flesh is merely survival. To live according to the spirit is the fullness of life.

The raising of Lazarus was a teaching moment, a foreshadowing of the resurrection to come. Lazarus was resuscitated with his body like it was before, not the resurrection body that Jesus would have on Easter. While Jesus could pop into locked rooms with no problem, Lazarus still had to be untied from his wrappings (John 11:44). Today is to sharpen our appetite for Easter. St. Paul said, “If you were raised with Christ, see what is

above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1). Christians are already participating in eternal life, and we are called to live accordingly. In heaven of course, that life reaches its fullness. That will be good. Very, very good.

Blessings

Fr Jim