

Homily-THE RAISING OF LAZARUS  
THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT  
March 9, 2008

The greatest and most powerful image of hope is the resurrection. In the first reading, Ezekiel uses resurrection as a metaphor to describe the future of his people. For John, the revival of Lazarus was a sign anticipating the resurrection of Jesus. For Paul, the resurrection of Jesus was a reality, the ground of our faith and the basis of our hope of sharing in Jesus' resurrection.

Daniel Harrington writes that in Ezekiel 37 the prophet sees a vision of his people rising from death to life; he sees their dry bones coming to life again with flesh restored upon them. The vision is a grand metaphor of hope for Israel in exile in Babylon in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. The people who seemed dead will come back to life again. That was Ezekiel's great hope.

The reading from John 11 tells how Jesus restored his friend Lazarus to life. This is not a resurrection as we assume that Lazarus will die again. This is a sign which points to the resurrection of Jesus. What Jesus does for Lazarus, his heavenly Father will do for Jesus. In his resurrection Jesus will conquer death. Thus the restoration of Lazarus is a preview of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

The restoration of Lazarus not only points to the resurrection of Jesus but it also sets it in motion. The last public action by Jesus in John's Gospel arouses the jealousy and fears of the opponents of Jesus.

The story begins in a curious way. Jesus learns that his good friend Lazarus is very sick. Instead of rushing to the side of Lazarus Jesus decides to remain where he is for two more days before making the journey to his friend. Jesus indicates that he waits two days so that the glory of God might be shown through Lazarus.

The purpose of the raising of Lazarus was that God's glory might be made manifest through this event. For the Christian community, the raising of Lazarus was a sign that Good Friday was not a defeat as Jesus had power over death. It is a sign that Jesus' passion, death, resurrection and exultation constitute one glorious event in the history of our salvation. As Jean Marie Hiesberger stated at the parish retreat she offered our parish, "within our darkness there is always light."

Just as in the stories of the Woman at the Well and The Blind Man, which we have heard during this Lenten Season, those who encounter Jesus are called to grow in faith. Throughout the Gospel both Martha and Mary are called to deepen their faith in Jesus.

Martha has faith in Jesus' ability to raise Lazarus for the dead as a miracle worker. She does not have full faith. Jesus says that he is the resurrection and the life and that the only way to resurrection and life is through belief in him. Martha has a limited faith and Jesus is attempting to help her grow in faith.

Mary shows her lack of faith through the tears that she weeps at the tomb of Lazarus. Jesus becomes disturbed at her tears. We often read this verse as if Jesus is merely sad at the death of his friend. Instead of merely being sad at the death of his friend Jesus is angry at the lack of faith that he sees in the lives of Mary, Martha and the Jews. The Gospel shows that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He calls all to believe in him as their source of life.

In the reading Jesus states, "I am the resurrection and the life: whoever believes in me, though he should die, will come to life; and whoever is alive and believes in me will never die (John 11:25-26)." Jesus asserts that for those who believe in him eternal life has already begun. And those who believe will experience the fullness of life at death.

Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb. Lazarus, bound by the trappings of death, comes out. Lazarus comes out and is set free by Jesus. The story points to the transformation of Lazarus as he is given new life. The story calls for transformation in the lives of those who hear the story. Through faith in Jesus Christ those who hear this story are transformed and begin a new life in Christ.

#### Diocesan Stewardship Appeal

This weekend is Diocesan Stewardship Sunday. The theme of the Diocesan Stewardship Appeal is "We Are the Body of Christ." The Diocesan Stewardship Appeal reminds us that we are members of the Body of Christ through our membership and participation in our parish but also as members of the Diocese of Shreveport and as members of the universal church. Being members of the church brings along with it both benefits and responsibilities. We benefit from the support of the diocese through the leadership of the Bishop and pastors. We benefit through the knowledge that our retired priests such as Fr. Moore and Fr. Inzina are provided a stipend to assist with their living expenses. We benefit from the ability to receive the Catholic Connection free of charge. This past semester Michael Broussard taught a wonderful Greco Course on Church History. The course and travel expenses were covered by the diocese. The expenses of our seminarians come from the Diocesan Service Appeal. When I was a seminarian 12 years ago the diocese spent \$20,000 per year for my education. The future pastors of this pastor are being trained at the expense of the diocese. You can assist with these costs. The costs of the Protecting God's Children Program are covered by the Diocese. This is the program which helps to ensure that the children in our parishes are safe. These are all benefits of the Diocesan Stewardship Appeal which have a direct impact on our lives. As members of the Diocese of Shreveport we not only receive benefits from the diocese but we have responsibilities as well.

Msgr. Earl sent me a letter to thank Good Shepherd Church for its generous gift to the Diocesan Stewardship last year. This is the first time that I have received such a letter. I ask that this year we do our part in assisting helping meet the budget of the diocese. Msgr. is right. We were very generous last year. We donated \$85,000 last year to the Diocesan Stewardship Appeal. Our goal this year is \$90,000. I have no doubt that we will meet our goal this year.

I ask that all families please help in this effort. I would like at least 70% of our families to give.

There are pledge cards and envelopes at the end of each pew. Please take a pledge card and envelope home and prayerfully consider what you can give to help in this effort. You may return the pledge card in the collection or to the church office.

The diocese has given us an ambitious goal. I ask that you assist me in helping the parish to reach its goal. Let me thank you in advance for your assistance with the Diocesan Stewardship Appeal.