



Homily for 3/21/2021

5th Sunday of Lent/3rd Scrutiny

Very Rev. J. David Carter, JCL, JV

Death and Life

The Coronavirus has reinforced one thing very clearly for us. We are mortals. Death is an inevitable part of life in the valley of tears we call life on earth. As a human being we must come to terms with this reality at one point or another. So-called “progress” does not have the power to change this, no matter what the false prophets of our day claim. The myth of immortality, without God, is an idol that many set up and worship. This idol has been slayed very handily by a tiny little virus that has confounded those who rely on science or progress to be their god. Now, science is good, but it has its limits. Progress is good, but it is not an absolute good. The reality is that we are finite beings with a finite lifespan. No matter how progressive we become, we will never achieve perfection or eternity in this world. Death is inevitable. Sometimes we employ different coping mechanisms to delay facing this reality. One is to ignore death, as if it didn’t exist. One is to be fascinated with death, a morbid curiosity that sickly enjoys it. One is to fear death, to live in anxiety and fear. All of these approaches to death are flawed in one way or another.

Wisdom seeks a way of understanding death that is healthy: to find peace in facing the inevitable. Wisdom leads us to understand that man is made for more than this life offers. Wisdom teaches us that though the body will die, the soul is immortal and will continue into the next life. Wisdom teaches us that progress to perfection by our own power is a myth and a false idol. Wisdom teaches us that while scientific inquiry has its place and is very beneficial to mankind, it has no power to save us from the inevitable. Wisdom comes to us most definitely through God, the almighty, eternal and immortal One. The One in whose image we have been made makes Himself like us in our mortality in order to show us the way through death into eternal life. Jesus Christ is God’s wisdom made flesh. Jesus declares Himself to be the Resurrection and the Life. He declares, “whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” Jesus is the answer to the existential angst we feel at the inevitability of death.

The invitation to believe in Jesus means throwing off the old coping mechanisms of ignoring, relishing in or fearing death. Belief in Jesus Christ means we can’t ignore death. Instead, we must face it head on with the hope that comes with the resurrection – we were made to live, and live we shall! Belief in Jesus Christ means we ought not be too fascinated with death either – we are not sadists or masochists who take pleasure in suffering. Rather we are courageous victors over death; “O death, where is your sting?” Belief in Jesus Christ means we are also freed from the anxiety and fear of dying. “Whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.” “Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live.” Jesus Christ brings us true freedom to live in the present, because we are not anxious about the future. We are in God’s hands and God is a living God “who desires not the death of the sinner, but rather that he be converted and live.”

Today, the elect who are preparing for the Easter Sacraments will receive their third scrutiny. By means of the grace of conversion, they will be unbound from the chains of death that bind the human soul. By God’s power we pray that, just as Lazarus was unbound from the burial cloth, they too might be ‘untied’ and ‘let go’ from fear and anxiety. We pray that they might receive Wisdom from on High and that they may live as children of the Living God. It does us all well to reflect on this great mystery of our salvation. As we have sated our thirst on the living water that is Christ in the first scrutiny, and as we have been enlightened by Christ and now see in the second scrutiny, by His grace so now we can live fully as the immortal creatures we are made to be in this third and final scrutiny before the Paschal Feast. Let Martha’s words be ours, “Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.”