

## ***Shall Not Die Forever***

Death has a way of .... well .... stopping us dead in our tracks. It shocks us. Stuns us. Paralyzes us. It is the stark reality of sin. It is the strongest preaching of the law – that “the wages of sin is death.” It cannot be denied. It cannot be avoided.

But we don't want to go there. We don't want to talk about death, we don't want to deal with it. But we must ... we will. And so, Jesus brings us face to face with death today – using Mary and Martha and Lazarus – to deal with your death.

It's obvious from our text that Jesus loves Mary and Martha and Lazarus. What's not so obvious is that – everything He says and does – is His love for them. I know, His delaying and letting Lazarus die doesn't seem loving to us. We're right there to say – “Lord, IF you had been here ...”

Death stuns us. Shocks us. Being in mourning is unsettling, discombobulating. You're not sure what to think, or feel. If you've experienced the death of a loved you, then you know what it's like to just try to get through things – through the funeral plans, service, and all the other things that death brings with it – marching on, in a stupor.

Jesus come to Mary and Martha while they are in the midst of dealing with the death of their brother Lazarus. Jesus comes to them – for you – for your sake – for you who are faced with the reality, and unavoidability, of death.

Mary and Martha know who Jesus is – that's why they sent for Him in the first place. Jesus, the Lord of life, could have healed Lazarus from whatever was ailing him. “If you had been here, [Lazarus] would not have died.”

But even after the fact, Martha has faith in Jesus – “But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” It's not too late Jesus, you can still do something about it.

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” But that's in the future. Right now is full of pain and suffering, full of tears and sorrow.

Is a future resurrection all that they have to hold onto? Are they supposed to live a life of waiting?

Mary and Martha are face to face with death. They are also face to face with Jesus, who says – “I AM the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

To believe in Jesus is life. And this promise, this gift – is for everyone – it is for “whoever” believes in Jesus. And what a promise it is – that he will live, even though he dies. The promise for all who LIVE and BELIEVE in Jesus – is literally that he – “shall not die into eternity” – he “shall not die FOREVER.”

Yes, our bodies will die (if the Lord does not return first) – but the Lord also promises that He will resurrect our bodies. That resurrection IS something that is in the future – but that death is but a sleep, as Jesus alludes to when He tells His disciples that Lazarus is “sleeping.”

Let me ask you a question that I often ask the catechumens. “When do you have eternal life?”

Christians often think that eternal life comes on the Last Day – when Jesus resurrects our bodies and takes us to heaven. Listen to what Jesus says earlier in St. John’s Gospel: “Truly, truly, I say to you, WHOEVER hears my word and believes Him who sent me HAS eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”

When do you have eternal life? When you “live and believe” in Jesus. Do you believe this? Not just that Jesus will do something for you in the future – but that even now He gives you eternal life. You HAVE eternal life – and even though you die, yet shall you live.

Dearly beloved, that truth, and that faith – changes LIFE now. It changes you. When Jesus resurrects Lazarus – He’s showing us what is already true for WHOEVER lives and believes in Him.

And that is what Jesus is doing today – giving eternal life to believers – resurrecting sinners who are dead in their trespasses and sins to a FOREVER life. That’s what He does when He baptizes you – for you are baptized into His death and resurrection – and just as Jesus has already died, so you have died to sin – and just as Jesus is resurrected to eternal life, you too have eternal life, and will share in a resurrection like His.

When you come and kneel before Him – He places His resurrected body and forever living blood into your mouth – resurrecting you – enlivening you – changing your life – giving you faith, and hope – now, for today, and tomorrow – and forevermore. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.