

5th Sunday of Lent, Cycle A, April 2, 2017

“Bat boy found in cave!”

That’s how the headline read. On the other hand it appeared in the national Inquirer. Evidently, fake news has been around for quite a while. You don’t have to wait till April Fools’ Day to encounter it. It’s hard to know what to believe, or who to believe. That has been true for a long time.

That’s why Jesus says to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live. And everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Jesus addresses the same question to us.

Do we believe in him, even though we have not seen the amazing sign of Lazarus being raised from the dead? Do we believe in him, even though we too often see death in our midst, from the crime in our streets, from the warfare in the Middle East, especially in Syria, from the terrorist attacks in various parts of the world, most recently in London?

Do we believe in Jesus Christ? Do we believe that he can bring us fullness of life?

When Jesus calls Lazarus forth from the tomb, he does not call forth a resuscitated corpse, a zombie. Rather, he calls forth a human being, fully alive. It is a great miracle. But, it is more than a miracle. It is a sign, packed with meaning.

It is a sign to the crowds of God’s power, the proof which validates Jesus in their eyes. It is a sign of hope for Lazarus, a sign which anticipates the resurrection promised to him and to all followers of Jesus. It is a sign to all of us, that faith in Jesus Christ leads to fullness of life, fullness of life now, and beyond the grave.

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. But, it was only a temporary reprieve. Lazarus knew that eventually he would die again, of illness, accident, or old age. He knew that he was not immortal. Nonetheless, the experience of death and resurrection surely gave Lazarus a new outlook on life.

Lazarus still had the same amount of time left in his life as he did before. But, he readjusted how he looked at that time. He no longer needed to fear death. He could see it as a way to new life. The same thing can happen for us.

Once, I knew a man who had a near-death experience. He saw a light at the end of a tunnel, the whole bit. He had suffered a massive heart attack, and for a brief moment had been technically dead. Because of that experience, he readjusted how he looked at the remaining time he had left in his life. He no longer feared death. He saw it as a way to new life.

This particular man died several years ago. And Lazarus died a long time ago. But their testimony lives on. It lives on as a sign of hope for us and as a challenge to our faith. The question which Jesus first addressed to Martha, he now poses to us:

“Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live. And everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”