



From A Bishop's Journal (739)

Family- and Parish-Based Catechesis on Peace (5) “You Will See the Glory of God”

The liturgical texts for the Sundays of Lent hold an extraordinary richness. They help us discover or rediscover the deep dimensions of our lives, of our individual and community existence, of our baptism, and of our day-to-day commitments. In the wake of the great prophets, Jesus unfolds before us – in raising Lazarus from the dead – the marvels of the future that is ours, following our earthly pilgrimage.

A Simple Inscription: R.I.P.

Once in a while I visit the cemetery where my parents and friends are buried. It is there, very often, that is expressed the faith of our ancestors and our contemporaries. This is a reality we hardly dare talk about, in funeral homes, except when prayers are said. *Que deviennent nos morts ?* [“What Happens to Our Dead?”] is the title of a book by Sister Marie-Thérèse Nadeau, C.N.D. In this book she raises the important question of Life after life and points out that at our baptism we already share in Christ's resurrection. Why, then, should we recall these mysteries when we want to understand peace better? On most headstones and even at cemetery gates we find this expression of our faith: “R.I.P.,” “May they rest in peace.”

“That You May Live...”

In chapter 37 of Ezekiel, the prophet reveals to us the power of the Spirit who can give life to dry bones. The prophet had been brought to a valley filled with bones, and there, he was asked to prophesy over them so that they would come to life. At the prophet's word, the bones began to rattle as they came together, bone joining bone, with the sinews and flesh coming upon them, and the skin covering them; but there was no Spirit in them. So the prophet was told: “Prophesy to the Spirit, prophesy, son of man.” And Ezekiel prayed: “From the four winds come, O Spirit, and breathe into these slain that they may come to life.” And the Spirit came into them; they came alive and stood upright, a vast army. Then it was revealed to the prophet: “These bones are the whole house of Israel. They have been saying: ‘Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost, and we are cut off.’ Therefore, prophesy, and say to them: ‘I will put my Spirit in you. I have promised, and I will do it.’” And the prophet Ezekiel continued: “Thus says the Lord God: O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them, and bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord,

when I open your graves and have you rise from them, O my people! I will put my Spirit in you, that you may live.” In the cemeteries we visit, and the funeral homes with their remains of our parents, of friends and of those we don’t know, it is the same mystery that is revealed to us: from all the bones dispersed all over the earth, from all the ashes scattered to the four winds, the Spirit is powerful enough for our brothers and sisters to live again, and live forever! This is exactly what we profess in our funeral liturgies: “Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven.”

But What Peace?

Many of our present-day fellow humans believe that everything comes to an end at the death of a person, no different from the death of an animal; however, there are some among them who are willing to grant the possibility of an afterlife for their favourite pet. The peace called upon the deceased, far from being a boring routine, is a happy peace. Some even say that we would soon get bored doing the same thing for all eternity, and so they very much want to continue in earthly life as long as they can. The peace wished to the deceased is peace in its fulness, outside of time and of all earthly contingencies, a peace without limit, for learning and loving. The passing instances of happiness that we enjoy and so deeply appreciate here on earth give us only a glimpse of the joy that no one has ever been able to describe, except for Jesus and a few of his friends to whom he gave a glimpse of this marvellous reality. The peace asked for and offered surpasses the peace that we can experience in our own milieus. We have only to ask those who have been victims of wars during months and years how they would describe the peace they experience after the hell they have been through: words fail them as they try to describe the tranquillity and the indescribable burgeoning of life they now experience.

What Does the Resurrection of Lazarus Teach us?

It is important for us to return over and over again to the events that took place at Bethany, a village near to Jerusalem where some of Jesus’ close friends lived. The events show us great moments of faith and friendship in the lives of Martha, and Mary, and Lazarus: the illness and death of Lazarus, the condolences of their fellow villagers, Martha’s faith in Jesus who took his time in coming to them in their grief, the sadness and tears of Jesus, and the exceptional revelation of his deepest identity and his mission: “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... If you believe you will see the glory of God displayed.” Having reached the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus gave thanks to his Father: “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I know that you always hear me but I have said this for the sake of the crowd, that they may believe that you sent me.” After that, Jesus called loudly, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, bound head and foot with linen strips, his face wrapped in a cloth. “Untie him,” Jesus told them, “and let him go free.” Even if we usually talk of the ‘resurrection of Lazarus,’ it is more exact to speak of the ‘reanimation of Lazarus,’ because the resurrection is a transformation of the whole human being, as we shall see as we deepen this great mystery of our faith. However we can say that the reanimation of Lazarus would be one of the main causes for Jesus’ arrest and death.

For the Glory of God

As Jesus said to Lazarus' two sisters: "This sickness is not to end in death; rather it is for God's glory, that through it the Son of God may be glorified," so can we say that every illness can lead to the glory of God. And it is there that we can be real peacemakers: "Where there is doubt, let me bring faith. Where there is despair, let me bring hope, and where there is sadness, let me sow joy. O Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love with all my soul... Because it is in dying that we are born to eternal life." Peace is not a passing fantasy, it is an indescribable force for going through the most difficult times, and the realisation of a life-giving promise. And this peace is intimately linked to the glory of God. Saint Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon in France (130-200), said that the glory of God is man fully alive. "The glory of God is man fully alive, and the life of man is the vision of God. If the revelation of God in His creation gives life to every being on earth, how much more does the manifestation of the Father in the Word give life to those who see God?"

An Unshakeable Faith

The Apostle Paul wrote daringly to the Roman Christians: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will bring your mortal bodies to life also, through his Spirit dwelling in you." Let us pray the words of Martha as she professed her faith: "Yes, Lord, I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God: he who is to come into the world." Let us keep faith that the risen Jesus can give his Spirit to all who have gone before us and who truly rest in blessed peace forever. Happy, happy are those who go to their rest as peacemakers!

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03-05-08