

Homily, Sunday March 29th, 2020

Ezekiel 37: 1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 6: 6-11 and John 11: 1-45

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2 Chronicles 20: 12. " O Our God, will you not execute judgment upon them? For we are powerless against this great multitude that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are up on you." We do not know what to do in the face of this coronavirus epidemic, but our eyes are up on you.

Life. Death. Two big words, two big puzzles for our intelligence and for our heart. Instinctively we always postpone our confrontation with them, as we discreetly push the slightly hard pieces to the edge of the plate, or as we leave piled up on the table of urgent files. Existence ignores deadlines and delays, and takes care of asking us the real questions, especially when illness threatens us or strikes those we love. Today's reading of the Gospel of Saint John comes to help us face our fears and our discomforts. It allows us to look at life and death without anxiety for a moment, on a horizon of peace and hope. Let us be guided by the reactions of the two sisters, then by the responses of Jesus.

Martha and Mary, neither of them married, sometimes found it difficult to harmonize their temperaments; but they were united in the same affection for their brother Lazarus. Now Lazarus fell seriously ill; and the sisters together sent a message to Jesus, an admirable appeal of friendship and discretion: " Lord, the one you love is sick." What a model of prayer! Often, faced with the ordeal of incurable diseases and the slow deterioration of those who are most dear to us,

we do not know, we do not know what to ask of God. But the prayer of the two sisters says it all, and says it well, because it takes Jesus by heart: "The one you love is sick." Once Jesus arrives at Bethany, everyone reacts in their own way. Martha, enterprising, goes to meet the Master; Mary remains seated in the house. But Martha, embarrassed and saddened no doubt to have been alone at the meeting, comes to say to her sister, quietly, so as not to rush her grief: "The Master is here, and He is calling for you." And she said to Jesus: "Lord, if you had been there, my brother would not have died." "You would have prevented him from dying!" They seem to be saying both, from a distance, you couldn't do anything about it and now that he's dead, you can't do anything.

How will Jesus react?

Withdrawn for a few weeks, beyond the Jordan, so as not to provoke his enemies, Jesus returns to Jerusalem despite the danger, and his whole attitude reveals the authenticity of his emotional life. On two occasions, he shivers internally, seeing the sorrow of Mary and those who accompany him, then when he hears someone says: "He who opened the blind man's eyes was not able to prevent Lazarus from dying". And above all, in front of the tomb, Jesus cries, the tears of a man, so that people say: See how he loved him! Jesus went freely to his passion, experienced like all of us the tragedy of death and separation. But He looks further than bodily death, and, to prove that He has power over eternal life, He will give his friend a few years of life among his own. To Martha, who said to him: "I know that he will rise again at the last day". Jesus answers by focusing everything on his person as Son of God: "I'm the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me, even dead, will live; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die". Do you believe that?

To us, men and women of the 21st century, Jesus comes today to say, "Do you believe that?" And he sums up in a few words the creed of life and the resurrection, this creed which is for us is bearer of peace and hope: death is only a sleep, from which it will awaken us; new life is already in Him, already offered, already given to those who put their faith in Him; and that life will pass through bodily death, for he, the Son of God, who makes us live before, will make us live after. Even more, our body itself, this body of joy and misery, will share in this eternal life, in this blissful happiness, when Jesus, the Risen one, will resurrect us at the last day. Do you believe, today, that the final things will begin for you when everything has stopped? Do you believe, learning of your God, that his life plan includes all our dead? Do you believe that Jesus, the Risen one, gives meaning to your death in advance, and that this, today, changes the meaning of your life?

Brothers and Sisters, a few days before Easter, let us warm our faith in the faith of the church, and let us say, like Martha, with the same loyalty, with the same joy: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who comes into the world." Yes, having meditated on this portion of the Gospel, let us start again, more lucid and therefore happier, towards our fraternal task, towards our life of dedication and sharing, for the glory of God and the salvation of the world. Let us go, like Martha, towards those we love, and share our secret with them, whisper, so as not to constrain them in their freedom.

Suffering is a part of the human condition. To have a world where there would be neither pain nor suffering, God would have to intervene at all times. There would be no freedom, no responsibility. We could neither grow nor love. How boring! The world is a state of childbirth

and all childbirth is painful. It is a metamorphosis that is taking place. Jesus also used this image. He spoke of the joy that follows childbirth. When we are in pain, maybe we can hear, what am I giving birth to? A world where God would come to the aid of man to supply him would prevent man from coming true. The important thing for man is not to look for ease but to be mobilized against what crushes him. "Choose a great enemy, he will help you grow," says an African proverb. A world where man takes no responsibility would see man vegetate and lifeless, losing his soul in deep boredom. "In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity, consider [who God is]. (Qohelet or Ecclesiastes 7, 14). Like that, we will be able to face our suffering and overcome the challenging times we are facing.

God is infinitely good and all his works are good. However, no one escapes the experience of suffering, of evil in nature, which appear to be linked to the limits of creatures. Let us arm ourselves with courage, faith and hope to fight against everything that oppresses our brothers and sisters, everything that harms our health or our balance. It is a combat date. We do not resign ourselves to suffering. We fight against its causes.

Let us pray: Almighty God and mercy, Creator of heaven and earth, we come running to you in this time of a global pandemic of the Corona Virus, to beg for your help and to beg you to deliver us from the dangers around us. Give the necessary strength and skill to all those who are taking care of the sick. Make effective the means they employ in their healing, and make that, in the face of the fragility and uncertainty of human existence, we apply our hearts to this heavenly wisdom that leads to eternal life. Amen.