

Second Sunday of Lent – 2024 B

“So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what ‘rising from the dead’ meant.” This is the task of Lent for each of us, really: to understand what rising from the dead means; to know how to leave the past behind for something new, how to share in the sacrifice of Christ so we can also live with Him.

I use this small Crucifix on Good Fridays because it contains a relic of the True Cross. How it came to me is a bit of a story, but it is a priceless gift, not only because of that Relic, but because of the lived faith it carries. It was given to me by a woman with whom I did spiritual direction years ago. She is now long retired out of state and in her closing years. Hers was in many ways a difficult life – born with some genetic disabilities, she raised six children amid many hospitalizations and surgeries. Bedridden for months at a time, she would simply hold tightly to this Cross and pray.

During one of those bouts of illness, when she did not think she would survive, she made a list of the three possessions she had that were most precious to her, three things she could not imagine parting with ... ***and then she gave them away.*** I have no idea what the other two objects were, or who received them; but the Crucifix came to me, a gift I certainly don’t deserve but which I hold in stewardship until it will be handed on to someone else. ***Apart from its own value, it also means even more knowing the suffering that it has helped to interpret and comfort.***

In those difficult periods, I am sure she often asked herself, what does rising from the dead mean? Of course, it meant the final hope of eternal life. But it also meant starting over, rising from a sickbed to continue to care for her family and return the kindness she experienced from those who cared for her.

Each of us has some memories of moments in which ***God has revealed a glimpse of His glory*** ... perhaps looking upon a newborn child, or a majestic sunset, or looking into a loved one’s eyes and seeing that love returned. Perhaps it was a moment of insight in prayer, or an unlooked-for kindness. Yet even living AFTER the Resurrection, even having experienced such moments, we still may wonder about Jesus’

words that “the Kingdom of God has come in power.” If that is true, shouldn’t things be much different? Why do we still suffer with conflict and temptation, greed and anger, sickness and loss, broken promises and broken hearts?

The answer is not easy, but it lies in understanding *what KIND of power Christ wields, and learning from Him to think as God does*. We get a hint, a dim foreshadowing, in the somewhat shocking story of Abraham and Isaac ... the father willing even to sacrifice his only son, whom he loves. But it is not the first part of this drama that is most important. Rather, God saves Isaac, and spares Abraham his grief ... and instead provides the Sacrifice Himself, His only-begotten Son, Whom He loves. And we must not think of Jesus as an unwilling victim. The Son shares fully in the Father’s gift, giving His own life to spare us. *This is the power Christ wields ... the power of the Cross ... the power of sacrifice, the power of Love that gives Itself away freely but wisely, even today in this Eucharist*. This power endures past all military might and political systems, beyond philosophies and fads, more durable than any technology or social trend. Jesus comes, not to remove the suffering of our human condition, but to *redeem* it: to fill it with the presence of God and assure us that the Love is stronger than death. That is how God thinks.

What does rising from the dead mean to you? The hope of eternal life is central to Christian faith, but we also need those smaller resurrections along the way: to get up again when we fall and fail in our resolutions; to try anew when we are tired or run into obstacles; to not give up when we face long-standing struggles or in difficult relationships; to renew our trust and hope, day by day, in prayer. As we share now in the Eucharist, we receive the strength we need to continue our Lenten journey, that we may come to Easter and know what it means to rise from the dead.