

Mass of Remembrance 2018

Isaiah 25:6a, 7-9; Romans 6:3-9; John 11:17-27

Today we come here to remember our loved ones who have passed, we come in search of greater healing, we come to reflect on what they meant to us, and we come to support one another in our common experience of grief. In the Gospel Jesus comes into the midst of a group of mourners, he comes in a place where there is grief. They are searching for answers, they are wishing Lazarus could have been with them longer. Martha voices it best when she says to Jesus *Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.* She is saying “why didn’t you do something to stop it.” She knew Lazarus was going to die someday, she had hope in a future resurrection - she even says *I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day* - yet still she was in pain that he had died and wished it hadn’t happened. Jesus is sensitive to their suffering, Jesus feels the pain, as he feels our pain. We hear later in this story that once Mary comes to him and approaches with an open heart, his love and empathy overcome his composure. We hear: *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deep moved ... [and] Jesus began to weep.* He did not stop himself from joining in the emotions of those who were sad - Lazarus was his friend, and his emotion was genuine, the people who saw him said: *See how he loved him!* Jesus loves all of us and all those who we are here to remember, and he responds to our feelings in the same way when we approach him with an open heart as Mary did.

Jesus’ response to all this sadness is a message of hope that echoes down to the present day and applies to all of us: *I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me, even if he dies will live.* Jesus had firsthand experience of what it was like for a human to mourn, he had firsthand knowledge of what it was like to face your own death, he does not deny himself - or us - those emotions. He only wants us to realize that there is more than grief and sadness and loss at someone’s death, there is one who has power over death. When we hear passages like those in the first reading: *The Lord of hosts will provide for all people ... he will destroy death forever* and we hear Jesus say in the Gospel: *everyone who believes in me will never die*, we can get the wrong idea of what is promised. We can think, like Martha and Mary did, that the power of Jesus stops at being able to keep a human body alive here on earth and not die. That would be an

easy one for God. But God wants more for us than an eternity of life here on earth with all our daily struggles, with the losses, with the sniffles, with the competition, with the having to shovel the snow - God has always had a bigger plan than that!

The prophetic words we heard from Isaiah point to the one who will accomplish the promise, they look forward to the one who is the resurrection and the life, they look forward and prophesy Jesus' coming when he says: *This is the Lord for whom we looked; let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!* This is the shout that comes up amid our grief, this is the hope that punctures the veil of sadness - Jesus has come so that we can live after earthly death in a completely satisfying and peaceful union with God and escape the eternal death of an existence separated from God. This miraculous thing is only possible due to God using God's power not to make our bodies last for centuries, but to provide a way that we can be joined to the everlasting Body of Jesus Christ. Paul tells us in our second reading that *we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death ... [and] if we have died with Christ we believe that we also shall live with him.* Paul speaking to people who were confused and mourning the death of loved ones. He explains that God fulfills his promise spoken through the prophet by giving the Body of Jesus as a vehicle to enter into an eternal life of happiness. We enter that Body in Baptism and rise with Jesus if we continue to remain in union with the Body. That's a much bigger plan God had than just letting you get to your 500th birthday.

Today we remember those who have passed to another life, we may wish that we could have had more time with them. God wants us to have a full life here on Earth, and to be able to join him and these loved ones when it is our natural time to go through that barrier. In the meantime, Jesus comes to support us, Jesus weeps with us our grief, Jesus helps us to prepare to receive the promised saving from eternal death he has promised. As we speak the names of our loved ones in their memory, and support each other we should keep in mind the words of Jesus: *I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live.*