

My Brothers and Sisters,

In today's Gospel, we hear the story of Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead.

Two weeks ago, we heard the story of the Samaritan woman and the living water Jesus promised to give her. Water, of course, is the primary symbol of baptism. Last Sunday, we heard the story of Jesus' cure of the man born blind. Jesus gave him not only the gift of physical sight but also the gift of faith, the ability to see with eyes of faith. Today Jesus restores Lazarus to life but also promises eternal life. We might translate these readings, especially intended for our Elect, into an equation: baptism + faith = life. As Jesus said in Mark's Gospel, "*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved...*" [16:16]. The common element in all three stories is that the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, and Lazarus and his sisters all had very personal, life changing encounters with Jesus.

When Lazarus became ill, Martha and Mary sent word to Jesus: "*Master, the one you love is ill.*" When Martha heard Jesus was coming, she ran to meet him. After Jesus saw Mary, he was greatly troubled and asked to see where Lazarus was buried. And we are told that Jesus wept, causing people to say, "*See how he loved him.*" When he arrived at the tomb, he called Lazarus back to life even though he had been in the tomb for four days. As a result, not only was Martha's and Mary's faith in him deepened, but we are told that "*many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he had done began to believe in him.*"

As I mentioned last week, the first twelve chapters of John's Gospel are often referred to as the Book of Signs. Just as there were four levels of seeing in last Sunday's readings, there are three levels of life in today's readings.

First, Jesus restored Lazarus' physical life to him. Again, this was an especially powerful sign of Jesus' divinity because Lazarus had been in the tomb four days and decomposition would have already begun.

Second, Jesus pronounces himself Lord of life and life-giver: "*Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.*" In other words, Jesus promises eternal life to all who believe in him.

Finally, in the Old Testament, God through Ezekiel said, "*I will put my spirit in you that you may live.*" Paul's Letter to the Romans suggests that if God's Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus and the Father, is in us, we already enjoy the beginnings of eternal life even now.

My brothers and sisters, we also see at least two levels of faith in the story. Martha says to Jesus, "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*" She is professing faith in Jesus' ability to bring her brother back to life. However, Jesus asked her to take her faith to a deeper level: "*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.*" He then asks, "*Do you believe this?*" He is not asking her to profess faith in his ability to work miracles but to profess faith in him. "*She said to him, 'Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.'*" This is the faith that Jesus asks for from us.