

Fifth Sunday of Lent: Called Out of the Tomb

Lazarus come out from that tomb! We all need to come out of the tombs we find ourselves in, whether we put ourselves in those tombs or we were put into the tombs by circumstances beyond our control.

There are real tombs from which the Lord calls us. There is the tomb that we are in due to our very existence as human beings. What the ancient sages who wrote the *Book of Genesis* presented in the third chapter, the Fall of Man, is that mankind would rather push God aside, and lose himself and herself in the material world than listen to God, and keep Him in the center his life. Mankind turned from the Lord of Life. Turning away from life is turning to death. This was not God's plan for us. He did not want us to die. He did not want our bodies to decay, as they do in tombs. He wanted us to have a full share in His Life. Think about the Assumption of Mary, that solemnity we celebrate on August 15. Mary was created without sin, always enjoying the spiritual life. When her life on earth was over, her body was not put into a tomb to decay. She was united body and soul to God. That was what God wanted for all of us. He sent his son, the Word, Jesus the Christ, to restore our spiritual lives. Jesus calls us out of the tomb from the cross.

Many people are in tombs due to no choice of their own. They have a serious medical condition that greatly limits what they can do. Maybe they have cancer, or heart problems, emphysema or kidney problems. Or maybe they are suffering from pneumonia caused by the flu or the corona virus. Jesus is calling them, calling us all, out of the tombs that sickness puts us in. Jesus doesn't want people to be sick. He healed people during his earthly ministry. He still heals people, heals us. He calls us out of the tomb of sickness to be united to Him. As a priest, I have brought the sacraments to people in the last moments of their lives. Many have said to me, "I am going to be alright, Father. I might die, but I am going to be alright." The voice of the Lord calls us outside of our sick rooms, calls us to know that if we walk to Him, we will have life. No sickness can take the Lord away from us.

Some people are in tombs of their own making. They have experimented with substance abuse and become dependent on drugs, or they have given in to porn to such an extent that they are thoroughly addicted, seeing their lives dissolve around them. They may feel that there is no hope. But if they listen, they can hear the voice of the Lord, calling them, saying, "Come out of that tomb." And with the Lord they can walk once more into the light.

Another tomb that many people find themselves in is the tomb they construct with their anger. One of my favorite cartoon strips, *A Rose Is A Rose*, presented this brilliantly. In the first panel we come upon Rose, chained to the wall in a prison cell. She is all bent over. She is frowning. In the second panel, she stands up and starts unlocking her chains. In the third panel she is in her living room, where her husband, Jimbo, is sitting on a couch watching TV. Rose says to him, "I've decided to forgive you." In the last panel, she is dancing in a flower bed. So many people, so many of

us, are in tombs along with Rose in the first panel. We are angry because someone has done us dirty. We hold grudges. You know what a grudge is, right? A grudge is poison we take hoping that another person will die. One lady told me, "I don't care what you say, Father, I'm taking this to the grave." To which I can only say, "Well, that'll fix him." Look, Jesus calls us out of the tomb of anger. He does this by calling us to forgive. He told us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

When Jesus came to the tomb where that dear friend of his had been lain, he wept. That is the shortest verse in scripture. Jesus wept. He wept at what death did to the man he loved. He weeps at what death is doing to us. He does not want us in tombs, whether they are tombs others put us into or tombs we create for ourselves. He calls us out of the tombs. He calls us into the beauty of His world.

We have to take the step. We have to decide to leave that which is destroying us and walk out of the tomb. This walk might be difficult. We might have to walk despite the burial clothes tied around us. "Unbind him," Jesus said to those standing with Him after Lazarus stumbled out of the tomb. "Unbind Him," the Lord says to the Christian community whenever anyone takes those first uncertain steps into the light. "Unbind Him," the Lord says to all around us. We recognize our frailty, and allow others to care for us, as we are called to care for them.

"Lazarus come out!" Come out. You and I do not belong in cold dark tombs. We belong in the light. We belong dancing in the flowers with the Lord of Life.

In two weeks we will be celebrating Easter. We will be celebrating because the One who is the Lord of Life has called us to come out into the Fullness of His Life.