

STRONGER THAN DEATH

This is what consoles us in our times of sorrow and grief, when we are tempted to say: "Lord, where are you?" The Lord is crying with us, suffering with us. Through his compassion, he sows in us the seeds of faith and hope which blossom into resurrection and life. The tomb of our heart opens in the instant in which Jesus leads us to confess with Martha: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." Our faith in life after death is not based on philosophical arguments. We are persuaded that death is not the end of everything because the Lord has proved his faithfulness to us: he is "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all... are alive" (Luke 20:37-38). We do not know how we can remain alive when our bodies disappear, but we trust God's promise: "whoever... believes in me will never die". This is why we rise from death the moment we say: "I believe in you, Lord." This act of faith is the authentic worship through which we live for ever: it stands against all evidence to the contrary, does not waver even in our grief; it knows that God's love is stronger than death.

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Mass text

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Give me justice, O God, and plead my cause against a nation that is faithless.

From the deceitful and cunning rescue me, for you, O God, are my strength.

FIRST READING Ezekiel 37:12-14

PSALM Psalm 129

RESPONSE **With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.**

1. Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord, Lord, hear my voice!
O let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleading. **R.**
2. If you, O Lord, should mark our guilt, Lord, who would survive?
But with you is found forgiveness: for this we revere you. **R.**
3. My soul is waiting for the Lord, I count on his word.
My soul is longing for the Lord more than watchman for daybreak.
(Let the watchman count on daybreak and Israel on the Lord.) **R.**

4. Because with the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption, Israel indeed he will redeem from all its iniquity. **R.**

SECOND READING Romans 8:8-11

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Glorify and praise to you, O Christ! I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord; whoever believes in me will never die. Glory and praise to you, O Christ!

GOSPEL John 11:1-45

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Everyone who lives and believes in me will not die for ever, says the Lord.

Next Sunday's Readings:
Isaiah 50:4-7
Philippians 2:6-11
Matthew 26:14 – 27:66

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OPENING OUR GRAVES FROM WITHIN

There is a very cruel sentence in today's Gospel. It comes at a moment of great sorrow for Jesus. His friend Lazarus is dead. Jesus is greatly upset and cries. Someone, however, mistrusts Jesus' tears, thinks he is a hypocrite and disparages him: "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" This is our voice. We think that God would prove God's love for us more by preventing death than by sharing it and its consequences with us. Jesus comes to be with us in our pain. He does not look at our suffering from the outside but endures it with us. He is distressed and cries with us. Despite all this, however, we do not believe that he means it; we question the reality of his concern for us. This terrible sentence shows how compromised our conception of God and of love is. Our love is cheap. We think that we can help others without losing our comfort, without authentic compassion, that is "suffering with" another.

This caricature of love attests that we still are prisoners of the tomb of our unbelief, enclosed in our hearts of stone. God comes to open the tombs of our unbelief by removing our hearts of stone and giving us hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). God persuades us of God's love for us not by trying to impress us, to seduce us with magical tricks or miracles that would set God above us. God comes to us in Jesus not armed with power but with determination to embrace the whole of our human plight, including the experience of death, including our grief. Thus, Jesus does not prevent the death of a friend, but shares Martha and Mary's tears and walks with them in their anguished path towards hope. He even exposes himself to the smell and the inexorable disintegration that death entails: "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus lucidly faces death in all its horror before accepting himself to die and to be locked up in a sepulchre. This is God's bewildering way of fulfilling Ezekiel's prophecy: "Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves." Who could have foreseen that the Lord would open the graves not from the outside, but from within? Who could have predicted that he would open them not through a show of power and strength, but by sharing our tears?



The path to worship



Dr Luigi Gioia continues this series of reflections for Lent.

29 MARCH 2020

5TH SUNDAY OF LENT

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK I