

# Vespers Homily

## The Fifth Sunday of Lent

### March 21, 2010

*Psalm 130*  
*John 11:1-45*

*In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

“Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.”

Those are words from a sister grieving, feeling acute pain at the death of her brother.

Imagine how often Jesus must have heard those words in one form or another.

“Lord, if you had . . . .” He hears them still. He hears them all the time from those who must blame their loss on someone. Those are words spoken in anguish; Jesus knows that.

But still, how painful the real answer must be, painful to Jesus because the real answer to one whom He loves as a friend is “Yes. He would” – not compassionate, but true.

I have heard those words; we all do, all of us who wear collars. We hear them perhaps in different ways, but it is the same question.

“How could God let this happen; why my brother or sister or mother or father or child?”

I don’t know; I have no answer.

All I have is a promise, from Jesus, that death is not an end but a transition. Jesus promises that He has gone before us to be with God and to prepare a place for us and that, someday, He will come again and take us there.

Scripture tells us, and we say it at funerals, that in death “life is changed, not ended.”

I say those things. Do I know that? No. Do I believe that? Usually, but how difficult it is to look in the face of such profound grief when even Jesus wept.

How can I say these things? There is an answer to that, an old theological answer that would probably not serve for one in such grief, might not give comfort and assurance. It has to do with who we, you and I, and Lazarus, really are.

We are not simply soft, pliable clay, not just flesh and blood. God has breathed on us; we contain the spark of the divine.

In the old Roman Catholic Tridentine Mass for Baptism, the priest did breathe upon the one being baptized, a symbol of that divine breath that God breathed into humanity in Adam, breath that we all carry in us.

You and I have been washed in Baptism and made children of God, signed with Holy Oil as one of God’s own and touched by The Holy Spirit, made brothers and sisters of Christ.

We have two natures as did Christ, one perishable and one imperishable.

This mortal nature, this flesh, will ultimately wear out and perish. It is not made for immortality, not made for eternity. It has flaws and weaknesses and pains and problems; it is our mortal nature, and that is what we grieve for when we have lost one we love, the loss of the

presence of the loved one's mortal nature. Martha and Mary grieve over the loss of the mortal Lazarus.

This mortal nature, this flesh, will perish, but that spark of the divine, that breath of God, is imperishable. It does not die; by it we have eternal life. By it we overcome the limitations of our mortal nature. By it we have limitless perfection, and by it all that we truly are, human and divine, has eternal life.

The mortal flesh of Lazarus is raised by his compassionate friend to dry the tears of grieving sisters, but that flesh will die once more.

Once more, because we are promised that the day will come when the perishable and the imperishable will be united in resurrection to eternal life.

*In His Holy Name.*