HOMILY
5TH SUNDAY OF LENT
MARCH 25, 2012
THIRD SCRUTINY

EZEKIEL 37:12-14  ROMANS 8: 8-11  JOHN 11: 1-45

THEME: LIFE IS ALWAYS A PART OF DEATH

1. DEATH IS A PART OF LIFE
To face the reality of a loved one’s death and to help us be resigned to it, how many times have we said to ourselves and others, “Well, death is a part of life. That’s just the way it is and we have to accept it.” The death of a loved one always comes as a shock even after a long illness. I believe this is the case for two reasons: first, even though we know death is a part of life, we put the reality of death as far out of our consciousness as possible as we live our lives from day to day. And secondly even an expected death is a shock because death seems so final a separation from the one we love. Death is a part of life. But it’s also true, and here’s the good news, that life is always a part of death.

2. THE RAISING OF LAZARUS: LIFE IS A PART OF DEATH
That is the message in the Gospel story for today: Life is always a part of death. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he was dramatically saying to us that death never has the last word. Life follows death, life comes from death, life continues after death, death is but a bump in the road on the journey of life. “Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Jesus was not just giving Lazarus a longer life on this earth, for he would certainly die again. Jesus was demonstrating that for everyone who dies, eternal life is waiting. This is also the message of the prophet Ezekiel in the first reading in which God says to the Israelite people: “O, my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them….Then you shall know that I am the Lord….I will put my spirit in you that you may live.”

3. LIFE CAN COME OUT OF ANY DEATH
There is more good news in this story. There are many bumps in the road on the journey of life. Death is so much a part of life that we die many deaths before the final death of our bodies. Marriages die, businesses fail, jobs are lost, health is lost, loved ones are lost by alienation or death, self confidence can die, hope can die, financial security can be taken away. The list is endless. When one of these things happens to us, don’t we die in some way? I remember when I failed my first pastorate. I thought my priestly ministry, if not my very life, was over because I had done such a poor job. It took me 3-6 months to recover from that death and only with the help of some good friends, priests and lay. But life came out of that death along with a lot of wisdom and a determination to do it right the next time. The story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is the good news that Jesus can raise any of us back to life after any of the deaths that we experience on the road of our journey of life. I’m sure Lazarus was different after he came out of that tomb where he was for four days. Each resurrection in our journey of life makes us a different person as well.

4. THE THIRD SCRUTINY INVITES US TO RISE TO NEW LIFE
Today we have the third Scrutiny for our elect, Rita Edwards and Wanda St. Martin. Christ is asking us and them to examine our lives to see what is preventing us from receiving the new life he is offering. What grave of sinfulness or selfishness or unforgiveness have we buried ourselves in? What are the chains of death that keep us bound from which we need the Lord to release us? Are we ready to hear Jesus say to us as he said to Lazarus, “Come out, come out of that tomb of death you have buried yourself in and receive the new life I have prepared for you?”
5. THERE IS ALWAYS LIFE IN THE MIDST OF DEATH
As people of faith, we have to affirm the abundance of life that surrounds us: the flowers that beautify the earth, the vegetables that grow and nourish us, the abundance of animal life, the fish in the sea and the birds in the air, the mystery of the four seasons of the year, the mystery of our vast universe, the mystery of love and friendship and family.
In the midst of death, we are immersed in an abundance of life and this should strengthen our faith that any death that we experience on our journey of life is but a bump on the road and that God will bring life out of any of these deaths as well as the final death of our bodies. While death is a part of life, the raising of Lazarus is Jesus’ way of assuring us that life is always a part of death.