

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Christian Call to be promoters of renewed life and sustainable livelihoods for the poor and needy

Special Theme for the 5th Sunday

29 March, 2020

1st Reading: Ezekiel 37:12-14

2nd Reading: Romans 8:8-11

Gospel Reading: John 11:1-45

Mass Introduction:

Today as we observe the fifth Sunday of Lent, we are reminded that Jesus is the resurrection and life; the person who believes in Him will have eternal life. In the first reading the Lord promises His people that He will open their graves, raise them and will lead them back to their homeland. In today's Gospel Jesus responds to our grief. This is about the raising of Lazarus from the dead. We see Jesus both in His human vulnerability as He grieved for His friend, Lazarus, as He mourns with His friends Martha and Mary. We also see Jesus' divine power to raise Lazarus from the dead.

Are we dead to hear the cry of our brothers and sisters? Are we dead to see the injustice around us? Jesus exhorts us to place our hope in him, come to him and we will be resurrected with him on Easter day. The focus theme for the day calls us to be the promoters of renewed life and sustainable livelihoods for the poor and needy. Our effort towards this front will be to work with the marginalized communities in identifying potential livelihood options which are environment friendly and sustainable so that the marginalized communities have sustained livelihood. Let us rise with Christ to be the promoter of sustainable livelihood and reducing vulnerability.

Homily

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ Jesus,

We are on the fifth Sunday of Lent. Next Sunday, we will celebrate the Palm Sunday-Jesus's Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem

followed by the Passion Week which is the climax of the Lenten Season. During these days the believers focus upon the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus and meditate on the mysteries of our Salvation.

The readings of today are an expression of the power of God to give life. In the first reading taken from Ezekiel, God declares the impossible, "O my people, I will open your graves and I will raise from them", the Psalmist in Psalm 130 presents the cry of the soul for deliverance from the depths of Sheol, while the gospel of John has Jesus, the Son of God raising Lazarus to life and declaring, "I am the resurrection and the life".

As we are nearing towards the Passion Week let us understand the true meaning of Christian life before and after death. God is the sole master and owner of our life before and after death. God alone has the absolute power to give and to take life. This truth is revealed through the death and resurrection of His son Jesus Christ. As Christians as we are, we believe that death is a door through which we enter into heavenly home. Our faith tells us that human death is not the end of life but the beginning of a new and eternal life. This becomes explicit in Bethany when Lazarus the brother of Martha and Mary dies. The wailing Martha tells Jesus that if he was there her brother would not have died. Jesus replies saying, "I am the resurrection and the life".

Lazarus was only the male support to his family. Death of Lazarus was a great loss to the family and it was beyond acceptance for both the sisters. To console them with mere words would have only been a lip service. Jesus cries, pitying at the poor orphan broken-hearted siblings. He walks down to

the grave and gives life back to Lazarus. The scripture says- "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things, have passed away". (Rev. 21:4).

But, again back to the earthly life of Lazarus is something that transcends our understanding of life after death. People gathered around the tomb couldn't just fathom. How can a human being be brought back to physical life? But the scripture says, "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and will come out. (John: 5:29).

Through this, he showed the disciples and the world that he has power over death. Whether life before death or life after death the Lord is Master. Hence, it is absolutely essential to our faith as Christians that we believe in the resurrection of the dead.

The life on earth is a passing reality but it's a gift from God. He created life with a specific purpose to serve God and love his people on earth as you do to yourself. Hence, Life before death must be lived in accordance with the precept of God, if not we will have to face the consequence like the Israelites during the time of Ezekiel.

In the first reading of today, Ezekiel describes the plight of the tribe of Judah. They were deported to Babylon for which they were responsible, particularly the leaders of Israelites. They lived an undisciplined life. They neglected God. Consequently, their situation became as bad as being in the grave. Their religious, political and social life had just gone dead.

Compassionate God felt pity for them and comes down from his anger addressing Israel as "Oh my people". Yahweh shows favorable disposition towards His people. Israel's disposition is largely attributed to their loss of God's favor through disobedience. However, Yahweh's anger is not forever, and with him, no situation is beyond repair.

Yahweh is the God of living. Hence, he is reinstating and sustaining them to live. This shows that in God being alive is not just a physical thing, one can be walking about but is dead in God but even those physically dead could be alive in God, hence God is called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

In today's gospel, Jesus raises Lazarus from death, although he was four days in the tomb. This really backs up Jesus's claim that "I am the resurrection and the life". What was promised in the first reading by Father, is fulfilled by Jesus in the Gospel of today.

Hence, God is full of compassion and mercy. He reveals this in and through his son Jesus Christ. He offers life to the dead, he offers solace and joy to the brokenhearted, and he reinstates the displaced. The compassionate Jesus reveals his genuine love for the poor family of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. He not only gave life to Lazarus but also sustained the grieving family with his constant accompaniment.

Today Jesus invites us to imitate him do the same for the poor as he did in his time. During the season of Lent, it's indeed a call apart from prayers to go beyond our way and help out the poor. Imitating Jesus means being compassionate towards the suffering humanity. Imitating Jesus means giving life to people affected by different unfriendly social, economic and psychological situations. Imitating Jesus means to sustaining the life of the broken-hearted.

Lenten Campaign theme of Caritas India "Sustain Life, Sustainable Livelihood" draws our attention towards the poor, the needy and the suffering people of our society and invites us to be generous in caring for the poor. The saying is proverbial: "People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care". We Christians cannot claim to be true disciples of Jesus without being compassionate towards the suffering humanity. Jesus sacrificed his life for the humanity. He was the one who taught a true disciple must be willing to "bear his/her

cross” out of his/her love for the Master.

Bearing his cross implies coming out of our comfort zone and reaching out to the poor, the lonely and the people afflicted by sickness and sufferings and helping them with whatever resources we have. It also means making some sacrifices of our own comfortable life and sharing with the poor in all possible ways. Hence, during the remaining period of this holy and fruitful season of lent leading up to the great feast of Easter, let us be generous to help the poor to sustain their life and livelihoods. While our small acts of kindness and generosity towards the needy ones will help them to better their lives and livelihoods, these will surely give us the true joy of sharing in the new life which our Risen Lord Jesus Christ offers to us abundantly.

Amen.

(This homily was prepared by Father Sushil Modi, Administrator, Caritas India)

PRAYER of the FAITHFUL

Celebrant: Death could not defeat Him. Nor will it defeat us -if we have Martha's faith and follow Him. This is the reassurance as we approach Holy Week's celebration of Jesus' triumph of life over death, goodness over evil. Asking God to bless us let us place our prayers before Him saying.

Lord hear our prayer

1. Lord we pray for Our Holy Father Francis and all the leaders of the world that the Gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ may reach every person on earth through their lives.

We pray to the Lord. R/-

2. Lord who loves justice and righteousness may be the strength and guiding light of our government and policy makers, that they may strive to build the just society.

We pray to the Lord. R/-

3. We pray for those who suffer, whose dreams lie in the tomb, that the divine promise to open all graves and raise the dead may be active, bringing

them healing and hope.

We pray to the Lord. R/-

4. For our beloved dead, that Jesus, who wept at the loss of His friend Lazarus, may raise them up to the abundant life of heaven, and console those they have left behind.

We pray to the Lord. R/-

5. For all of us present here, that we may grow in the faith of Christ that he is the life and the resurrection and turn to him during the Holy Week to follow him closely so that we may be resurrected with Him from all our selfishness, greed and pride.

Let us pray to the Lord. R/-

Celebrant: Loving Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ and the gift of creation. Guide and lead us that we might be freed from all that binds us and find new life through Christ our Lord.

Amen

Fasting, that is, learning to change our attitude towards others and all of creation, turning away from the temptation to “devour” everything to satisfy our voracity and being ready to suffer for love, which can fill the emptiness of our hearts.

Prayer, which teaches us to abandon idolatry and the self-sufficiency of our ego, and to acknowledge our need of the Lord and his mercy.

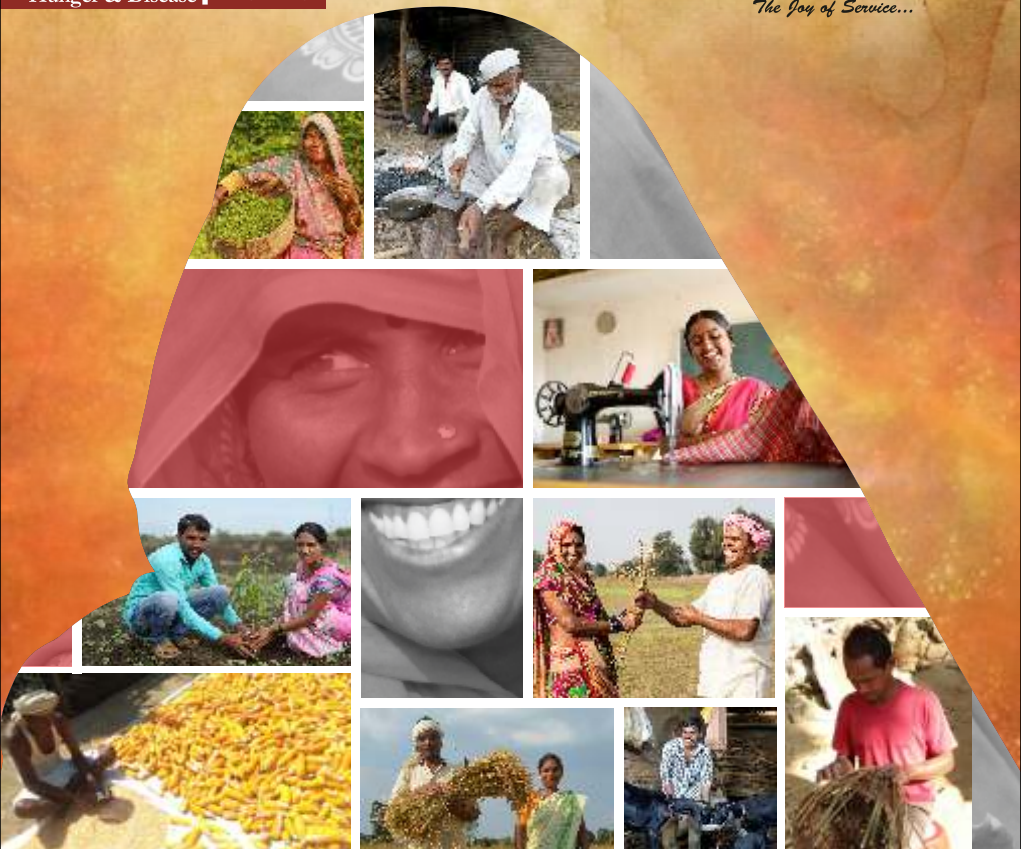
Almsgiving, whereby we escape from the insanity of hoarding everything for ourselves in the illusory belief that we can secure a future that does not belong to us.

Let us leave behind our selfishness and self-absorption and turn to Jesus' Pasch. Let us stand beside our brothers and sisters in need, sharing our spiritual and material goods with them.

**MESSAGE OF
HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR LENT 2019**

Campaign Against
Hunger & Disease | 2020

 **Caritas**
INDIA
The Joy of Service...



Sustain | Sustainable Life | Livelihood

समृद्ध जीवन: सतत आजीविका

Caritas India, through its annual Lenten Campaign 2020, focussing on the theme – Sustain Life: Sustainable Livelihood invites everyone to join hands and come together to be a catalyst – a change agent - to adopt “Each one Help one” approach in reaching out to attain a sustainable livelihood.

Let us pledge during this Lenten Season to contribute (financially/non-financially) towards enabling a sustained life. This doesn't only mean poverty eradication, but also building the capacity and capabilities of others to withstand the trends and the shocks. It also means that all of us start living our lives with a sustainable approach – by sustainable use of natural resource, reducing carbon emissions by using eco-friendly methods of traveling, reducing/recycling the waste products, enabling community-led initiatives.