

De Krijtberg, March 22, 2026. 5th Sunday in Lent. Ezek. 37:12-14, John 11:1-45.

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I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

Resurrection from the dead

The first reading and the Gospel deal with resurrection after death. In the first reading, the prophet Ezekiel speaks to his people in exile: the people are, as it were, dead, but they will come to life again, back in their own land. The Gospel reading also deals with death and resurrection: that of Lazarus. But this story also refers to the death and resurrection of Jesus himself. Right at the beginning of the Gospel, there is a reference to Mary who will anoint Jesus' feet with oil and dry them with her hair as a reference to the day of his burial (John 12:3, 7). The fact that Jesus remained where he was for another two days, and only left on the third day to his friend Lazarus in Bethany, also points to Jesus' own story: on the third day he is raised from the dead, and then it is Easter.

The raising of Lazarus refers not only to the raising of Lazarus and that of Jesus himself, but also to the raising of every dead person, including us. The raising of Lazarus is one of the earliest motifs in Christian art. On early Christian sarcophagus reliefs and catacomb frescoes, we see the bandaged Lazarus standing upright in his tomb. Opposite him stands Christ, tapping the mummy on the head with his staff. Mary, Lazarus's sister, lies at Jesus' feet. This depiction expresses the expectation that there is life for the deceased in his sarcophagus or catacomb tomb.

The conversation between Jesus and Martha

The raising of Lazarus is, of course, the highlight of the story. But there is another highlight, namely the conversation between Jesus and Martha in the middle of the story. I want to elaborate on this conversation. A development takes place in this conversation. Two things happen. In the first place, there is a shift in time. The conversation begins with a discussion of the past: "*Lord, If you had been here, my brother would not have died*" (Martha). Then follows a reference to the future: "*Your brother will rise again*" (Jesus). "*Martha said: I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.*" But the conversation ends in the present tense: "*I am the resurrection*" (Jesus). There's no point in

dwelling on the past; postponing it until later is an escape from the present. The past is over, the future is uncertain, but the present is current, and Jesus has a message for that, a message for here and now.

Secondly, the subject of conversation changes. The conversation begins with Lazarus and his resurrection. But it ends as a dialogue between two people. It is no longer about someone else (Lazarus), nor is it about something else (the raising of Lazarus), but ultimately it is about Jesus and Martha themselves. Jesus says who he is: *“I am the resurrection. Anyone who believes in me, even though that person dies, will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”* And Martha answers: *“Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ”*. The faith that Martha professes is more than a word: it is also an act. When Martha says to Jesus: I believe in you, I am your disciple, she is also saying: I believe in your message, I’ll follow you, I want to do as you do.

double meaning of life and death

The dialogue ends with Martha's surrender to faith. But what do life and death mean, as Jesus speaks of them? Life here does not have the obvious meaning of life sustained by eating, drinking, and sleeping. It means life that takes place on the interpersonal level. This life has to do with faith, trust, surrender, solidarity, responsibility, love. Just as there are two kinds of life, there are also two kinds of dying. On the one hand, the death that every human being must undergo, including Jesus. On the other hand, the true death, the spiritual death of the lonely egoist, who suffocates within himself.

Our resurrection

The Gospel is also about our resurrection. It also wants to call us to life. We can identify with Martha. At the end of his Gospel, John writes to his readers that he has written down the signs that Jesus had performed (the raising of Lazarus was the last sign) *so that you may believe... and believing this you may have life...* “ (20:31). Martha is the image of every believer. Everyone who reads or hears the Gospel of John is called to become like Martha, to believe in Jesus, to follow him on his path. Then a new life begins, a life in which love and solidarity are central, a life of eternal value, a life that is just beginning.

We are currently living in a time of distrust, resentment, and revenge, and of thousands of refugees and deaths. How to break this spiral of violence and counter-violence, death and destruction? The Gospel shows us a way: believing

in the way of Jesus, the way of dialogue, of listening to one another, of forgiveness and love. This is not an easy way. For Jesus and for many of his followers, this way meant death. But this death is not the real death, is not death in God's eyes. Life like Jesus cannot ultimately be broken. *“Anyone who believes in me—that is to say, walks my way—even though that person dies, will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”* Do we believe that?