



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

5th Sunday of Lent Year A

Jesus wept

Readings: *Ezekiel 37: 12-14, Ps 129, Romans 8: 8-11, John 11: 1-45*

It is one of those hoary old questions beloved of quizmasters when our cultural was Scripturally literate. 'What is the shortest verse in the Bible?' We have just heard it in this morning's Gospel reading. John 11 v 35 , *'JESUS WEPT'*.

The circumstances of His grief are a very private matter played out in a very public place. His dear friend has died and He is now amidst the very real distress of the sisters upon whose love and support He has often rested. It is an emotional time. For all Jesus' divine confidence in His power to raise the dead, He is moved by the tragedy of man's mortality and his utter fragility in the face of time and physical realities.

For all our confidence in the Resurrection of Christ and our hope of rising with Him and those whom we love who have gone before us in Faith, we too weep in the presence of the dying and death of those we love. It is part of our humanity. It is part of Jesus' humanity too. Fully God, fully Man.

If He is not Man He cannot represent us. If He is not God, He cannot save us.

In John's Gospel we encounter a private grief, but one with universal implications. In our Old Testament lesson we encountered the great prophet of the exile, Ezekiel, in conversation with God.

The people of Israel have been invaded, defeated, massacred, the remnant stripped of everything and taken into exile in the cities of their conquerors. Everything that God promised has been taken away because of their sinfulness. The promise to Abraham seems to lie in ruins. The ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom, demolished and exiled by Assyria, will never rise again. The little tribe of Judah, exiled to Babylon, hangs by a thread. All around are death and defeat and disaster.

In the midst of this the prophet is given a vision of the future wholly at odds with the physical and political reality in which he and his fellow exiles are living. God takes pity on His people. God acknowledges that His people are dead and in their graves, no more now than dry bones. BUT.... God commands His faithful servant to prophesy over the dead people. That is to say he is to speak the Word of God to them, the Word we will come to know Incarnate in Christ Jesus.

We all know what happens next (whether we have read Ezekiel or not – though I hope you have) because we all know the song... The bones in the graves begin to reassemble, 'The foot bones connected to the ankle bone, the ankle bone connected to the shin bone, the shin bone connected to the thigh bone....now hear the Word of the Lord'.

The skeleton completed is now robed in flesh and blood and awaits only the gift of life which God alone can bestow. The breath is summoned by the same Word and the life and the soul re-enter Man, quicken the moribund

people of God. In this extraordinary vision, which then becomes an historical reality, we see God's endless mercy and pity on His people, His longing for their restoration, reconciliation and renewal. His desire for them to respond to His Word and receive His Spirit and have life.

That longing heart of God for us to have life and have it abundantly and have it eternally is encapsulated in the vision of Ezekiel and is brought home to us in this morning's Gospel where we are allowed to draw very close to the Divine Mercy and see the quintessence of God's compassion for His beloved creature mortal man, in the tears of Jesus.

It is this vision of our salvation and these tears of love in the face of loss that leads the Son of God to Calvary. There both sin and death will be defeated and the tombs of the faithful will be emptied in the glorious resurrection and we will walk free, with Lazarus, of the bonds of the grave. This time it will be forever.

If we truly want the other fallen to rise we must, with Ezekiel, continue to speak God's Word over a spiritually moribund culture. That means knowing our stuff, being familiar with God's Word. And that means calling on the Holy Spirit of God to enliven the Church with the urgency of the Mission, beginning with ourselves and our parishes. Each one of us open, like Our Lady, to the same Spirit that we might bring Christ into the world for our time.

Only if we weep with Jesus over the plight of mortal man will we act. Only then can the dry bones live. Only then will our brother, Lazarus, rise from the dead.