The Fifth Sunday of Lent March 26, 2023

Surprise! Many of us have been to a surprise birthday party or surprise anniversary celebration. There is a Surprise Party going on right now and you are invited. The surprise is to look on life with the eyes of faith, to see exactly what you see now but to see it in a different way.

A child whispered, “God, speak to me”  
And a meadowlark sang. The child did not hear.  
So the child yelled, “God, speak to me!”  
And the thunder rolled across the sky  
but the child did not listen.  
The child looked around and said, “God, let me see you”  
and a star shone brightly,  
but the child did not notice.  
And the child shouted, “God, show me a miracle!”  
And a life was born but the child did not know.  
So the child cried out in despair,  
“Touch me, God, and let me know you are here!”  
Whereupon God reached down  
And touched the child.  
But the child brushed the butterfly away  
And walked away unknowingly.  
(Old Hindu poem by Ravindra Kumar Karnani)

Again and again in the Gospel of John people misunderstand Jesus. They understand his words in the normal human way, but Jesus wants to raise people’s thinking and understanding to a new higher way of looking at life. His words surprise people, because he is asking them to see him in a new way, divine rather than human.

* Jesus said, “Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” (John 2:19) Those who were listening misunderstood and thought he was talking of the temple in Jerusalem. They said it took forty-six years to build the temple, but Jesus was talking of his own body. When Jesus rose from the dead his disciples remembered and believed. (John 2:19-22)
  + Jesus said to Nicodemus, “no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” (John 3:3) Nicodemus misunderstood and asked, “How can anyone who is already old be born? Is it possible to go back into the womb again and be born?” (John 3:4) Jesus has to further clarify, “no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit; what is born of human nature is human; what is born of the Spirit is spirit. (John 3:5-6)
  + Jesus asked the woman by the well in Samaria for a drink (John 4:7). When she complained because he was a Jew he answered, “if you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me something to drink,’ you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water.” (John 4:10) She misunderstands and thinks Jesus will offer her running water like water from a faucet so that she won’t have to come to the well every day. So Jesus clarifies further, “whoever drinks this water will be thirsty again; but no one who drinks the water that I shall give will ever be thirsty again: the water that I shall give will become a spring of water within, welling up for eternal life. (John 4:13-14)
  + Jesus said, “Whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.” (John 6:51) But they quarreled among themselves saying “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” But Jesus reiterated, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.” (John 6:53-56) At this many of Jesus’ disciples abandoned him and returned to their former lives. (John 6:66)

We see that many times in the Gospel of John people understand Jesus’ words in a human way but Jesus wants to raise people’s thinking and understanding to a new higher way of looking at life. His words surprise people, because he is asking them to see him in a new way, divine rather than human. And so, we come to today’s Gospel where Jesus said to Martha, “Your brother will rise.” (John 11:23) Martha professed her faith in the resurrection at the last day, “I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day.” (John 11:24) But Jesus wants to take her to a new understanding of resurrection,

“I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26)

Jesus wants Martha to know that it is through Jesus himself that Lazarus will rise again, “I am the resurrection and the life…” Jesus is the resurrection. Jesus also wants Martha and us to know that for anyone who believes in Jesus’ death has only the appearance of death because we live after death, “whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live.” In fact, if we believe in Jesus we will not die, in the sense that the life we live in Christ now will continue after death, “everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” When we live as Jesus calls us there is a continuation from this life to the next. When we live as disciples of Jesus it is as if we will almost not notice passing from this life to the next because spiritually, we will never die. So, the resurrection is not just something in the future, Jesus offers life now. The new life in the resurrection is for now. To prove his words to Martha, Jesus raised Lazarus. Don’t miss out on the offer of Jesus’ life to you now. Don’t waste life. Live life with Jesus. Live the life of Jesus now so that you will not die.

How can we live this life of Jesus now? Jesus offers us his life every time we come to Mass, every time we receive the sacraments, every time we pray, every time we read Sacred Scripture.

In his love for us all, Christ gives us the sacraments to lift us up to everlasting life.  
The sacraments are the special ways we meet Jesus. In the sacraments we touch Jesus and Jesus comes to us. Jesus gave us the sacraments to lift us up to everlasting life.

There is a Surprise Party going on right now and you are invited. The surprise is to look on life with the eyes of faith, to see exactly what you see now but to see it in a different way. To do this, allow Jesus to rise you up to new life. The resurrection is not just something in the future, Jesus offers life now. The new life in the resurrection is for now.