

## Lent 5A

*This story is told about a pastor of a small congregation. He kept a meticulous register of all his parishioners. Such was his faith in life after death, that whenever a parishioner died he did not delete their name from the register. He simply wrote after the person's name, 'changed residence, gone to a better place!' The deceased haven't gone away, they've simply gone ahead. We hope to be reunited with all our loved ones in the next world.*

Scientists tell us that nothing in nature, not even the tiniest particle, disappears without a trace. Nature does not know extinction - all it knows is transformation. Since man is the apex of God's creation, it would border on the irrational if death were to nullify his existence.

Humanist funerals, to me, fall way short of the mark in the sense that they have nothing to say about the final destiny of man. They can only talk about this life. Unfortunately a lot of Church funerals are falling into that same mould as well. But the Christian message is loud and clear and we find it in Jesus's answer to Martha - "I am the Resurrection and the Life - whoever lives and believes in me will never die"

Martha said to Jesus: 'If you had been here, my brother would not have died'. Aren't we sometimes tempted to ask the same question especially when it comes to the untimely death of children or anyone we love for that matter. We could ask: 'Where were you Lord when these heartbreaks took place'? Many people blame God when people die tragically or they see Him as a detached bystander, oblivious to human suffering.

But the story of Holy Week is that Jesus shares in our brokenness and tragedy-prone world. On hearing of the death of Lazarus, Jesus broke down - he was genuinely moved to tears. I think two of the most moving words of Scripture are:

'Jesus wept'. Our belief in life eternal is not meant to be a magic formula to relieve us of grief when someone we love passes away. When Jesus wept over Lazarus, the Jews said: 'See how much he loved him'. So entering into another's pain is an extension of our love for that person. Jesus takes away the sins of the world but not the suffering of the world. I think it would be a retrograde step for this country if euthanasia were legalised as it has been in some European countries. With the Brexit vote I know there are a lot of things we'll miss about Europe but there's a lot we won't miss as well.

They say that 'love is stronger than death'. It has a kind of eternal resonance about it. It means that death won't catch us off-guard. The manner of our death, or even pain associated with it, will not unsettle us. The real tragedy is when death catches us napping. The story of the foolish bridesmaids is a warning to us all.

*So today, the fifth Sunday of Lent, the Church asks us to keep our eyes on the goal which is life Eternal. We are on a journey, however long or arduous, to the Promised Land of heaven. There we shall see God.*