

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'! We hope to be reunited with all our loved ones in the world to come.

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 absurd if death were to nullify his existence.

Humanist funerals fall way short of the mark because in their tribute there is little or no mention of the final destiny of the deceased. All they can talk about is the past life of the person. Unfortunately a lot of Church funerals have fallen into that same trap. 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 a loved one. We could ask: 'Where were you Lord when our loved one was taken from us so prematurely'? Many people blame God when people die tragically or they imagine Him standing on the side-lines, 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 doesn't override the grief we feel with the passing away of a loved

one. If anything, it makes it all the more intense. When Jesus wept over Lazarus, the Jews said: 'See how much he loved him'. So entering into another's grief portrays 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. It's sad when people are drawn to end their lives because of the advancing deterioration of their physical or mental capacities. Despite dying in pain and bereft of all dignity, Jesus didn't come down from the cross when the frenzied crown on Calvary incited him to do so. He drank the cup of suffering to the dregs.

They say that 'love is stronger than death'. It has a kind of eternal resonance about it. It means that the manner of our death or the discomfort associated with it won't faze us when love is the touchstone of our lives.

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 where suffering and sorrow will be no more.