

We have three great readings set for today, and they all share a similar theme, the theme of life. The readings all anticipate the great events of Easter that we'll soon be celebrating. I want to speak mainly from that wonderful Old Testament reading from the Book of Ezekiel. But first, let me just pick out a couple of things from the two other readings that we've just heard on this theme of life.

Jesus says in the gospel, "I am the resurrection and I am the life." And in fact, he has much to say on the subject of life, particularly in John's gospel. He said in Chapter 10, "I've come to bring life, life in all its fullness." The life I'm talking about this morning is a resurrection life, which isn't the same as a life that begins after we die. If we look at John's gospel carefully, we can see that this life that Jesus offered, this resurrection life, is something that we can begin to experience now.

So, when Jesus talks about being born again in Chapter three of John's gospel, he's talking of starting now that life which will have an eternal dimension, a life that can begin in this world as we're born of God's spirit. Saint Irenaeus, a great church father, expressed it like this. "The glory of God is a person fully alive."

How many of us actually feel fully alive? I asked someone once who was unfortunately addicted to drugs, I said, "Why do you take drugs?" He said, "Well, they make me feel alive." And much of modern life, from video games, social media, TikTok, whatever, it can have a deadening effect on us and make us feel less than fully alive, that we're living not in the glorious technicolor of the resurrection life that Jesus offers, but in a dull black and white copy. I think that's why so many of my middle-aged friends are jumping out of airplanes, going down the Cresta Run, or buying convertibles. They want to feel alive.

What they need isn't more excitement. They need to experience the fullness of the resurrection life that Jesus offers, that Spirit of Jesus in our lives. Just hear again, this incredible verse from that epistle from the Book of Romans that we heard read. Paul writes this, "If the spirit of him who

raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through the spirit that dwells in you." That's a deep and profound thought. He who raised Christ from the dead will give you life too. That's the kind of life I want.

And as we turn to this vision that Ezekiel has in our Old Testament lesson, we'll see the same theme there, that only God can bring life. And in this famous passage, the prophet Ezekiel is given a vision of a place of desolation, which becomes a place of hope, a place of death which becomes a place full of life. And the background to the vision is that 10 years or so earlier, the people of Israel had been taken with the prophet into exile, into the land of Babylon. And it felt to the people of Israel that the whole people were entombed in a foreign land. The period of exile was looking like a national burial site. The situation looked bleak. The people say, "Our bones are dried up. Our hope is lost." Things couldn't get any worse. In fact, the situation to the people looked irredeemable, but not to the prophet Ezekiel.

Look at how he answers God's question. God says to him, "Can these dry bones live?" The answer's obvious, isn't it? Of course, they can't. It's a bit like if someone says to me, "Will your darling wife Laura arrive on time?" I'd like to think so, but of course not. But when God says to Ezekiel, "Can these dry bones live?" he remembers who's asking him. He doesn't give the obvious answer. He says, "Oh Lord God, you know." Or in the old version, "Thou knowest. Thou knowest, Oh God."

What a great answer that is. He avoids saying what he can't feel. He's being asked to look at this valley of dry bones and say, "Can these dry bones live?" Well, Ezekiel doesn't feel like jumping up and down and saying, "Yay God. Of course they can." So he doesn't say it. "Thou knowest." It's more measured, more circumspect, more honest. Dare one say, more Episcopalian. "Thou knowest." That's all he could say. It's not possible Ezekiel knew, from a human point of view. But God's view was different. And He knows. And Ezekiel was right. God did know. God could bring hope out of despair. Ezekiel

knew that God could speak to the people and say,
"I will put my spirit within you and you shall live."
God and only God was able to bring life where
before there was only death.

And this and our other readings set for today
anticipate the great events of Easter that we'll be
thinking in the next two weeks. The question put to
Ezekiel is a Good Friday question, "Can this
crucified body live?" Well, of course not. But God
knew different. God knew that life could come
where there was only death. God knew that that
wasn't the end of the story, that He could bring life.
And let's stay with the Easter story for a moment.
Someone might have looked at the disciples after
the crucifixion, that despondent ragbag collection
of men, and said, "Can these people preach a
message that will transform the world" Didn't look
like it. But God knew. God knew that they would be
invigorated by His spirit and be bold and preach a
message that did indeed transform the world.

And what about the big questions of our life? Can
this relationship improve? Can this situation
change? Will I always feel this way? God knows.
And God knows that He alone can bring hope
where there is despair.

Let me close by quoting God's words to the
prophet Ezekiel, "I will put my spirit within you and
you shall live." And may that be true for each one
of us as we enter more fully into the Easter season
in these next few weeks. May we indeed know that
the spirit that raised Jesus from the dead can dwell
in us, that we too can have life and know that life
of the spirit that raised Jesus from the dead.

Amen.