

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent  
April 2, 2017  
St. Agnes Church

A new pastor was assigned to a Catholic Church in a small town in Kansas. He spent his first week making visits to the homes of his parishioners. He was sure to invite them personally to attend Mass on Sunday.

To his dismay, when the time came to keep holy the Lord's Day, the church was all but empty. He decided action was necessary. He placed a notice in the local newspaper stating that, because the church was dead, it was everyone's duty to give it a decent Christian burial. The funeral was scheduled to be held the following Sunday afternoon.

Surprisingly a large crowd turned out for the 'funeral'.

As they entered the church the people saw a closed coffin up in front, surrounded by flowers. The priest read the scripture readings and delivered the eulogy. He then stepped over, opened the coffin, and invited the people to come forward and pay their last respects to their dead church.

Most all of them gave into curiosity and lined up to come forward and view the contents within the coffin. Some thought it might be empty, but it wasn't. Every person who walked by that coffin and looked in it....saw themselves. The pastor had placed a large mirror in it.

I am tempted to follow the example of this pastor....  
and not because today is April 1....Aprils Fools Day.  
The last thing I want to do is to get a laugh at your expense....  
even if it does get the point across.

I won't mince my words this afternoon/morning.  
I'm here to speak the truth.  
And if the truth hurts your feelings....well...so be it.  
You are dead! The members of St. Agnes Church are dead.  
We need not have a funeral, however. Not yet, anyway.

It is logic that brings me to this conclusion.  
Some of the supporting evidence comes by way of my observations and experiences,  
but mostly it is logic that leads me to believe: You are dead!

And, not to wash my hands of the responsibility for making this statement,  
but I refer you to a wise, insightful, trustworthy individual  
who made this statement long before the thought entered my mind: Jesus Christ.

Jesus says to the Pharisees and scribes, to the religious leaders of Judaism in his time, and to all who reject his word, his identity: "You are dead!"  
 Jesus says to all unrepentant sinners, all those who choose to live in darkness, all those who are disobedient to God's commands: "You are dead!"  
 Jesus says to the wicked, to the unjust, to the corrupted...  
 he says to the greedy, those who fail to discipline their instincts and restrain their passions, to those who don't remember the poor,  
 to those who put their trust in material prosperity and earthly wealth..  
 he says: "You are dead!"  
 Jesus says to those who fail to respond to God's call when he says "turn back to me"...  
 "you are dead!"

Here's the logic part.

The consequence of sin is death. This is a statement of faith.  
 Anyone who sins suffers the consequence.  
 Since we all have inherited the sin of Adam and Eve (a truth of the Christian faith) we all suffer its consequence: death.  
 Because we sin...we are dead.  
 Lazarus was dead for 4 days. How long have you been dead?

The greatest Christian hypocrisy is to claim: I don't sin.  
 Now the truth might actually be... I don't know my sin.  
 If so, we had better be praying every day: "Lord, help me to know my sin."  
 Sin is more than succumbing to the temptation to do evil.  
 Sin is also failing to pursue the good, failing to do the good, failing to do God's will.  
 And again the truth might be...I don't know the good. I don't know God's will.  
 If so, we had better be praying every day: "Lord, help me to know and to choose what is good, what is right, what is just, what makes for peace, what promotes unity and harmony.  
 Help me to know and embrace Your will."

Because we sin, we are dead.  
 And those who are dead find their home in the darkness of the grave...  
 cut off from life.

We are Lazarus...held bound in a tomb of our own making.  
 Alone and without comfort.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not a condemnation to death.  
 It is a proclamation of life.  
 Those who are dead because of sin aren't doomed for all eternity.  
 We don't have to remain in the death of sin.  
 As a matter of fact, our destiny is life.  
 But we must claim that destiny.  
 The love of Christ will not leave us to rot in our sin.  
 Jesus weeps over our sin.

And to fulfill God's promise to raise us up out of our graves  
 Jesus comes to the tomb we are in  
 and calls out in the loudest of voices: "COME OUT!"  
 We choose: to stay in the darkness or come out into the light.  
 Like Lazarus, our life in God, through divine mercy and forgiveness, can be and is restored.  
 We come out and stand in the light.  
 But there is something more.  
 We must be unbound, unwrapped, set free.  
 Lazarus' body was wrapped like a mummy.  
 That's what sin does...it imprisons us.  
 It wraps itself around us like a second skin.  
 Only someone on the outside can remove, can untie the bindings.  
 But in this story Jesus doesn't say "Lazarus. I set you free."  
 He says to his disciples, to Lazarus' family and friends,  
 he says to those who are standing nearby:  
 "You untie him. You...let him go."  
 Jesus has the power to bestow new life to sinners.  
 There is the reality of divine restoration...  
 a return to life so we can continue our journey to the Kingdom.  
 But in this miracle story Jesus gives the responsibility of unbinding to his Church.  
 And for 2000 years the Church has been unbinding sin  
 through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

After Lazarus was called out of the grave, given new life by Christ,  
 set free from what bound him up...he didn't start over.  
 His new life wasn't necessarily a new beginning.  
 He didn't start writing the book of his new life at chapter 1.  
 It was a continuation of his old life, his former life.  
 I'm sure that if Lazarus owed money to the bank...  
 after he was restored to life, raised from the dead,  
 I imagine the banker sought him out and said  
 "Lazarus, old buddy, I'm glad to see you're back.  
 I'll expect your next loan payment in 2 weeks."  
 Bottom line: forgiveness and new life do not erase responsibility.

Until we are willing to respond to Jesus' command: "COME OUT of your sin",  
 until we are willing to claim the life he offers  
 by stepping out of the darkness and stepping into the light....  
 until we allow the Church to unbind us from the wrappings of sin,  
 then we will remain among the walking dead.....Christian zombies if you will.....  
 less than fully human.

If you chose to remain in your sin...we might as well go ahead and plan your funeral....  
 because you are dead already.

Hear O people, the voice of the Lord, the voice of Jesus Christ.

A voice that says "COME OUT!"

Come out of the darkness.

Come out of the grave you are currently occupying.

Stop pretending you are alive when in your sin you are dead.

Stop pretending you can see while you are in darkness.

Stop pretending you can handle the problem of sin on your own.

Stop pretending that sin isn't worth your attention and concern.

It can kill you, rob you of life forever.

God has the will, God has the power, God has the love, God has the plan, the intention, to raise us up, to bring us forth into the light, and to save us from the grave.

Our prayer today: "O Lord, because of sin, I am dead. But because of Your love, and the outpouring of grace, I am called forth and restored to new life in Your Son Jesus Christ. I rejoice in Your saving work. And I proclaim to all the world "You are the Lord of Life." Amen!"