



St Mary's Catholic Church

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Reflection:

In early 2008 I started working part-time as a chaplaincy assistant at Middlemore Hospital. No sooner had I started than I had to attend my first ever emergency. A teen-aged boy had just been involved in a car crash in Mangere and had sustained massive head injuries and was about to be taken off on life-support. Rushing into the Emergency Department, I saw the boy's mother and sister at his bedside. 12 years on, I have never forgotten the very challenging question that his mother asked that haunts me to this day: *Where was God when I asked him to look after my babies?* To say that I felt inadequate to respond is an understatement! As anyone who cares for the dying and their families will know, the whole process of death and dying is a reality that we'll never be able to escape or ignore or sugarcoat with fancy euphemisms to dull the resultant grief. In a way, death is a part of life. In the words of the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu: *life and death are one thread, the same line viewed from different sides....*

In this Sunday's Gospel, some very dear friends of Jesus, a pair of sisters named Mary and Martha, have just lost their brother Lazarus through death. So where was God in their time of loss? More to the point, where was Jesus? Why did he wait so long to respond to their desperate plea for help, especially when he knew full well that the one he loved like a brother was already on the brink of death? Jesus' somewhat tardy response appears to be too-little too-late. Or was it? Jesus obviously shared in their pain. Even to the point of shedding a tear or two. All that John says about Jesus' emotional state is this: that Jesus wept. Such a short yet powerful verse that reveals so much about the depths of Jesus' humanity. At the same time however, he also comes to draw from Mary and Martha a positive expression of our own faith in him personally: as the Resurrection and the Life. By restoring Lazarus to Mary and Martha in anticipation of his resurrection, Jesus not only restores his physical life, but also establishes our guarantee of eternal life. Whoever believes in Jesus, even if they die, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in Jesus will never die. Far from being morbid, John's narrative of the raising of Lazarus shows us just how precious this life is; not despite its fragility but because of its fragility. Life and death are one thread, the same line viewed from different sides.

In addition to our Gospel, our first reading from the prophet Ezekiel and Paul's forceful declaration of Christian hope in our second reading from Romans are also concerned with resurrection to newness of life. Ezekiel's imagery of dry bones being reassembled and re-clothed with flesh and sinews was a powerful expression of hope and restoration for the Israelites during their exile in Babylon. In Paul's view, the God who raised Jesus from the dead will raise us also because the same Spirit dwells in us. At this present time of exile from our usual forms of sacramental worship and everyday social interaction as a community in the face of COVID-19, these servings from the table of God's word will have to sustain as we wait in hunger for the Eucharist. As we begin our indefinite period of "lock-down" as a community, let us all think of the ways that we can still celebrate the gift of life. Even in the face of the Government's justified call for "social distancing", we must remain connected so as to preserve our community through relationships of love that can defy death; lest we end up entombed in a fear that will end only in social death. Safe forms of outreach (such as a simple phone call) will spell the difference between hope and despair for many in the coming days. Even though some aspects of life here at St Mary's will be radically different for the duration, some other aspects will remain the same as ever. Fr Peter and I will naturally endeavour to respond to everyone's pastoral and spiritual needs as best we can. Stay safe, be kind to yourselves and please don't panic buy!

Kia Kaha. Kia ora. Kia Ki nga manaaki O Te Reneti mo te katoa mo te wiki e haere mai ana (Stay strong. Stay well. With Lenten blessings to all for the coming week), Fr James

