

We've just heard three great readings and much could be said about all of them, but there is a thing that's central to all three of those readings which is life. These readings are all anticipating the great events of Easter that we'll soon be celebrating. I want to speak mainly from the wonderful Old Testament reading we heard from the prophet Isaiah. But, first let me pick out a couple of thoughts from the other two readings on this theme of life.

First, Jesus says in the gospel, "I am the resurrection and the life." In fact, he has much to say in the Gospel of John on the subject of life. For example, in Chapter 10, Jesus says, "I came to bring life. Life in all its fullness." The life I'm talking about this morning is the resurrection life, but that isn't something simply that happens when we die.

It's very clear in John's gospel that eternal life starts in us the moment we're born of the spirit. Saint Irenaeus puts it like this. "The glory of God is a person fully alive." How many of us feel fully alive? I asked a friend of mine once why they took drugs and they said, "Because they make me feel alive." Much of modern life, the video games, mobile phones, the internet, all seem to have a deadening effect that can make us feel less than fully alive. As if we're living in black and white and not the glorious technicolor that the spirit of God can bring.

I think that's why so many of my middle aged friends are buying convertibles, jumping out of airplanes, and going down the Cresta Run. They want to feel fully alive. What they need though, isn't more excitement. They need to experience the fullness of life that Jesus by his spirit can bring into our lives. Just hear again this incredible verse we've heard from Romans. "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 his spirit that dwells in you."

That's a truly deep and profound thought. "He who raised Christ from the dead will give you life." That's the kind of life I want. As we turn to this vision of Ezekiel, we'll see there this same thing that only God can bring life. 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.

The background to this vision is that it is given to the prophet Ezekiel 10 years after the people of Israel had been taken forcefully out of their homeland into exile in Babylon. So these dry bones symbolize the whole house

of Israel, whose hopes 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 might look irredeemable to some, but not to the prophet Ezekiel. Look at how he answers God's question, "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 wife Laura arrive on time?" I'd like to say yes, but of course that won't happen.

When God says to Ezekiel, "Can these dry bones live?" the prophet pauses. He doesn't rush to state the obvious. Perhaps he remembers he's talking with God, to whom all things are possible. So he says, "Oh Lord God, you know," or in the old translation, "Thou knowest." Thou knowest. What a great answer. He avoids saying what he can't feel. He's looking at a valley of dry bones, he feels the pain of the exile, his hope has all but drained away.

He can't bring himself in answer to God's question. To bounce up and down and say, "Yeah God, you can do it! Of course these dry bones can live." He's more measured. Perhaps more honest. "Thou knowest." That's all he could say. It's not possible from a human point of view, but God's view is different. He knows. Ezekiel was right. God did know. God knew that he could bring hope out of the valley of despair. He knew that he 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. Our readings today anticipate the great events of Easter, which we'll soon be celebrating. The question put to Ezekiel, "Can these dry bones live?" is a Good Friday question. Can this crucified body live? God knew. When Jesus's followers gave up hope, as they put his body in the tomb, God knew that this wasn't the end of the story. He knew he could bring life.

If we stay with the Easter story for a moment, someone might have looked at the despondent followers of Jesus after the crucifixion and said, "Can these sad, broken, rag-bag collection of people be relied on to preach the good news?" God knew. God knew that the Disciples who were so downcast will be awakened by the Resurrection and change the world with their preaching.

What about the big questions in our life? Can this relationship improve? Can this situation change? Will things get better at work? Will I ever be well again? God knows. God knows that he can bring life where now there is only death and despair.

Let me close by quoting God's words again to the prophet Ezekiel. "I will put my spirit within you and you shall live." May that be true for each of us as we prepare for the great celebrations of Easter. May each of us be filled with the spirit of God that we might know the life that only God can bring.

Amen.