

Grace and Peace to you from God Our Father and from the One calling us from the tombs of our lives, Jesus Christ Our Lord, amen.

Almost every day we are confronted with some event that make us question our lives. For some it's a meeting with the boss, for others it's dealing with family. It might be not doing well in school or dealing with a relationship that has taken a sour tone. It might be the grief of losing a loved one. When things go bad in life we very often turn immediately to God. Just like in today's Gospel when Martha and Mary ran to Jesus and said "Lord, if you would have been here..." this never would have happened. We say, "God if only you had been with me..." Like God ever left... How strange it is we tend to think God isn't present in our lives when things are taking a downward turn. Sometimes it takes the shock of things going wrong in our lives to wake us up, to realize we've become caught in a rut. When your day has just been turned completely upside down and inside out, Jesus says the same thing to you he said to Martha and Mary. "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, they will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."

How is it possible to live even though we die? What is it to live and believe and not know death? Is Jesus speaking in riddles? No! But, it's hard to understand life without first understanding death. There is the physical death, when we stop breathing and our heart stops beating. We think of cemeteries and

flowers and funerals, but there's another kind of death, the death that happens when we find ourselves just going through the motions of life. I'm talking about the emotional and spiritual death that creeps up on us without our even knowing or suspecting anything has happened. Our bodies continue to function, but we're living a life of death.

For me, this happens when I find, nothing is new, nothing left to be discovered. When I face the same challenges, day in and day out. Nothing we do can change the fact there will always be dirty dishes in the sink and dirty clothes in the hamper, or a deadline to meet at work, a board meeting, or endless voice mails and emails to answer. We can become trapped. Yet at other times we find ourselves to be asleep at the wheel. We roll through one day and into the next with only a vague impression of what happened in between. We hardly even read the emails or listen to the boss because we know it doesn't make a difference. Instead of being frustrated we're simply indifferent. Sometimes we don't even realize how dead we are. We find ourselves sitting at our desk, or operating our equipment, or in a classroom and we feel neither frustrated nor indifferent. We're quite content with our work and our life. We consider it a good day to operate the same equipment day after day without change, without conflict, without variation. We've become as one of my favorite rock bands says, "Comfortably Numb."

In each of these cases, we become entombed in our daily lives. Whether you're a student or an employee, a parent or child, entering adulthood or retired, we all get wrapped up in the way our life is. The status quo for us becomes like the strips of cloth wrapped around Lazarus. Each one binds us in place, until we become unable to move. We become wrapped up with endless demands. The people at work bind us in their unrealistic expectations. Our teachers embalm us with lengthy assignments. Even our families bind us with high expectations.

Many people who lead a dead life of helplessness and hopelessness don't even feel the wrappings of death being added day after day. Each day adds another layer in the mummification process and we just lay there, still and unresponsive. The baby cries and we have a blank look on our face. The boss is yelling and you're making a grocery list in your head. The traffic is backed up for miles, but when you get home you can't recall one detail about the commute, not remembering a single turn or stop light along the way. Our lives are just on autopilot...

The most difficult situation of all is those of us who are happy with being in the grave. We enjoy our home, our family, our job, and our pet. We see interpersonal conflict as a natural phenomenon as people jockey for positions of leadership. Our huge debt is a necessary evil that enables us to live a lifestyle to which we have become accustomed. Family problems can be minimized by taking

great vacations or by getting all the right gifts. In the midst of the living dead Jesus offers us a new life. Not just a resuscitation of our old lives through knowledge or counseling or training or retail therapy, but an actual resurrection to a newness of life not previously experienced. Jesus tells us he is *that* life. We can cry out to Jesus like Martha and Mary did because we have a God who loves us and weeps with us in our times of frustration and helplessness. In reply, the Word of God calls out to us like Jesus called out to Lazarus in the tomb.

Through word and sacrament, we experience the power of Christ. In the words of our scripture and hymns we hear God call us out of the graves of our everyday lives. Even though we have been entombed in our dead lives for some time, and despite the smell of the way things have become, Jesus calls out to us and brings us to a life quite different than the life the world offers us. During worship, we're refreshed with reminders of our forgiveness of sin and remembrance of our baptism. We're nourished by the meal Jesus hosts for us as we gather around His table. Here is the place where God tears away the shroud that comes between people. Here is the place where we are reunited with God in the New Covenant. Yet even when we come out from our old lives, out of the tomb and out of the smell, we're still bound up with the wrappings of death. The relationships that are a part of the old life. The pressures to be like everyone else. The expectation we must make the deadline, get the job done, or do well on the

exams are still all around us. For our sake, Jesus continues to teach us how to pray and guides us in our faith. For our sake, Jesus intercedes for us on our behalf in our relationship with God. So, Jesus continues to call to us and commands us to unwrap him, unwrap her.

This is Jesus calling us to love our neighbor, to help unwrap the old life from one another. We respond to the call of Jesus to minister to one another in the same way the people outside the tomb responded to Jesus in ministering to Lazarus. We reach out to those around us and care for one another. Here in this place, in this community of faith, we have all heard the call to come out of our tombs. We hear the call of Jesus to lead a new life, to be something different than what the world wants us to be. We are called to compassion and love and grace and faith. So, we come together to worship the one who calls us. We also support each other. Together we rejoice every time one of those wrappings falls away, a bad habit, an old flaw, a dysfunction. Together we pray for the wrappings that remain on us, the struggles we continue to have as we emerge from the tomb. And sometimes when we think it might just be easier to lay down again on the slab and pretend to be dead, we pull each other up.

We share the peace of the Lord with one another not just because it's something we do in Church, but because when times are tough and we feel helpless and frustrated we need to know the peace of the Lord is indeed with us. So, we

extend our hands, reaching out as a physical sign we are here to help one another.

We are here to remove the bandages, and we are here to assist with emerging from the tomb of the living dead.

We minister to the community outside of these walls too, because we know firsthand the same issues keep all people in bondage. We respond to the call of Jesus to come out of the tomb, but we also respond to the call of Jesus to unwrap Lazarus our brother or Lazarus our sister who is struggling in their own lives. We don't fear the stink of poverty, the stink of homelessness, the stink of "otherness," because we believe in Jesus, and we know Jesus will bring new life in His time and in his way.

Today is a day we remember not only our neighbor, but our loved ones who have passed away. On All Saints Day, we remember also those who have gone before us into the physical death. We remember their faith, the grace they were shown and the grace they showed other people. We remember their strength and their courage. We remember that through the Holy Spirit they were baptized into the church of Christ. We remember they became a part of the communion of saints and their sins were forgiven. We look forward to the resurrection of the body and give thanks to God for life everlasting. Thanks be to God for all the Saints, including each and every one of you gathered here today and those from our congregation who could not be with us here today as well. AMEN!