

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT (Year A)
3-22-2026 Homily

Introduction

One of the greatest political activists, novelists, and historians of the 20th century was the Russian author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who died in 2008. He chronicled the evil and repressive history of the former Soviet Union, and spent many years in harsh prison camps as a result of his efforts to record and witness to the truth. His numerous writings described the struggle for human freedom under Communism, and Solzhenitsyn himself faced life-or-death questions. As a political prisoner, he was forced to work at hard labor for up to twelve hours a day. He had earlier lost his family, and then the doctors at the camp told him he had terminal cancer—so one day he thought to himself, “There’s no use in going on; I’m going to die soon anyway.” This prompted him to act in an unthinkably dangerous manner: he ignored the guards, dropped his shovel, and sat down to rest, closing his eyes.

A moment later Solzhenitsyn sensed someone standing next to him. Opening his eyes and looking up, he saw another prisoner—an old man he had never seen before, and whom he would never see again. Without saying anything, the old man took a stick and traced a cross in the ground in front of Solzhenitsyn, and then walked away. This simple moment made all the difference for the Russian author; as a Christian himself, he was suddenly reminded that the Cross of Christ can conquer death. With his hope renewed, Solzhenitsyn picked up his shovel, went back to work, and continued living. A year later he was miraculously released from prison and allowed to emigrate to the United States, where he learned that his cancer wasn’t terminal after all (*Pulpit Resource*, Vol. 2, #18, p. 5). The Cross symbolizes Jesus’ power over sin and death—sometimes in a physical sense, and always in the more important spiritual sense. We can easily be downcast or discouraged, but there’s always reason for hope—for God never abandons us. Even when the world sees only death, Jesus can give life.

II. Development

All human beings experience death, but today’s readings remind us that God’s power can turn this apparent defeat into a victory. Hundreds of years before Christ, Ezekiel prophesied, “O My people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them. . . . I will put My Spirit in you that you may live. . . . I have promised, and I will do it, says the Lord.” Jesus fulfills this promise, as the Gospel illustrates; He raised or restored His friend Lazarus to life as a foreshadowing or preview of the eternal life He will give to all His followers. As Our Lord said to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in Me, even if he dies, will come to life.” In the Letter to the Romans St. Paul tells us that if the Spirit of God lives within us, we will share in Christ’s victory. Even though all of us will sooner or later die physically, our true selves will—if we remain true to Jesus—live forever in happiness and glory.

III. Conclusion

These are difficult and dangerous times for the world, for our country, and for many of us personally. Nevertheless, God is always in charge, even when it seems tragedy or evil has gained the upper hand. Jesus restores the dead to life. This will ultimately occur in the future, at the end of the world, but in a certain sense, it can also take place now—for His grace can give us guidance, encouragement, and peace when we're spiritually dead, or when life seems very hard or challenging. Consider all the martyrs of history: those who died for the faith not only in the former Soviet Union, but throughout history, and persons of our own era who have been or are being killed because they worked for justice and religious freedom. The world might call them failures because their efforts led to death; Jesus calls them heroes because their fidelity brought them eternal life.

We all know people who've overcome great tragedies, disappointments, and setbacks, and we ourselves probably had times when we wondered how we'd be able to keep on going. And yet, we're here; we're on the right path, and we're not alone; God gives us everything we need to persevere. This will never make sense from a worldly perspective, with its concepts of cutting your losses, keeping things cost effective, and forever looking at the bottom line—while always putting yourself first and, if necessary, ignoring the needs and desires and feelings of others in your efforts to get ahead.

God doesn't work that way—and if we're smart, we'll take this truth into account and live accordingly. Very simply, this means praying for the Lord's guidance, trusting in His presence, and doing what's right, even when it doesn't seem to make sense. Martha and Mary trusted Jesus even though it seemed all was lost; their faith and love allowed the Lord to work a great miracle. We may not be facing a situation quite like theirs, and we may not experience the Lord's response in such a dramatic way, but He promises to be with us—in life and in death. God has made a sacred covenant or agreement with us, and the Cross of Jesus is His signature. As long as we have faith in Him, there is nothing for us to fear.