

Fifth Sunday of Lent

In different countries and societies, death is associated with colors. In the west, mourners traditionally wear black. In China, white has always been acceptable because it represents happiness and prosperity in the next world. Gypsies used to wear red at funerals to symbolize physical life and energy. Red was also the color representing death in the Celtic world and foretelling disaster. Moslems believe that the souls of the just assume the form of white birds.

This idea spread to Europe in the Middle Age, the mourners in England wore white for centuries before black become the fashion.

In our gospel today, Jesus went to the house of His closed friends, Martha, Mary and Lazarus. In the road, He knew already that Lazarus got sick. When He arrived, He was dead already for four days. He cried when He saw Martha and Mary crying. Most especially He cried when Martha said to Him: "Lord, if you have been here, my brother would not have died," (v. 21). It is because this shows Martha's failing confidence and trust in the Lord.

Why death is so frightening? In fact, death is the way towards eternal life. This is what we believe. This is what our gospel is telling us today.

We do not celebrate death. What we celebrate is life. Even in funeral masses, we are celebrating life and not death.

By the way, what is death? As far as I know, there are five definitions: First is the biological and medical definition of death. Death is the moment at which irreversible destruction of brain matter, with no possibility of regaining consciousness. The moment at which spontaneous heart beat could not be restored, as established by ECG (Electrocardiogram). Or it is the moment of "brain death" as established by the EEG (electro-encephalogram).

Second is the traditional understanding of death. Traditionally, death has been understood as the 'break' between the physical body and the soul. It is a 'break' with this world including one's family and friends. It is an event over which man can only passively accept and over which he has absolutely no control.

Third is the magisterial definition of death. Death is a consequence of sins. This magisterial definition is based on the book of Genesis 2-3 (the sin of our parents) and the letter of St. Paul to the Romans 5:12-14; 3:21; 6:23. Death is a moment where a spiritual element endowed with consciousness and will survive after death.

Fourth is the modern theologian's definition of death. For Estanislaus

Boros and Karl Rahner that it is a period of final decision where a person makes a final choice to accept or reject Christ or God. According to Boros that it is not just adults but infants too would be able to make their decision in full liberty and knowledge at the moment of death.

Fifth is the experiential definition of death. Why death is frightening? “May be because every time that this enters into our mind,” Fr. Celso Godillano, SSP said in his homily, “we think that all the beautiful things in our lives will come to an end. For example, we will be separated from our loved ones and they forget us completely after death. Plan, ambitions and dreams will not be fulfilled. We are afraid because we don’t know what will happen to us in the other life. No one who went there came back to tell us the image of heaven and hell. Nobody would like to accept that we would die. We want to live forever. Yes, we can live forever but not in this world but beyond this world.

So Jesus entered the scene saying: “I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in me even if he dies will live,” (v.25).

In other words we have to die in order to have life. We have to die to our sins in order to be forgiven. We have to die of our vices in order to be good and responsible person. We have to die to our anger and hatred in order to make

our relationship with the other becomes better and many more.

Death is sacrifice. Death is conversion. Death is change.