

A recent cartoon I saw shows a client walking into an addiction treatment center. Posted next to the receptionist’s desk is a directory of services: 1st floor, Facebook; 2nd floor, Twitter; 3rd floor, Instagram; Roof top, Texting while walking.

Ours is a culture filled with words. A word, specifically THE WORD, stands at the center of this weekend’s liturgy. The first reading from the prophet Ezekiel is the end of the famous passage of the plain filled with very dry bones. The prophet is told by God to utter the divine word over the bones. “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.” With these words the bones rise, are clothed with flesh, and walk, a vision God later will fulfill as he restores the people of Israel to their homeland from which they have been exiled.

Word and spirit are one reality. Breath, spirit, is the life force that animates every living being. Words are the means by which we humans give shape and form to breath/spirit enabling communication with one another. Besides communicating basic information, words have the power, the spirit, to deal injury and death or to give and restore life.

The opening of the Book of Genesis tells us that while all was dark and void, the breath/Spirit of God hovered over the abyss. Then the author goes on to describe God giving breath form to Spirit, “and God said...and so it happened.” By the divine word, life, natural, animal, and ultimately human were created. God’s Spirit-embodied word, known as the Logos in Greek, equally God, is God’s Son in whom and through whom God speaks the divine word. In the plan of God the eternal Logos/Word was united with our humanity in the person of Jesus. Jesus is God’s Spirit/embodied word, and like the word spoken at creation, the word of Jesus brings life. It is this revelation of God’s Spirit/embodied word in Jesus we contemplate in today’s familiar Gospel account of the raising of Lazarus from the grave, four days following his physical death.

The scene of Jesus' arrival at the home of the late Lazarus and his grieving sisters Martha and Mary is full of emotion; emotions any of us who have suffered the death of a loved one well know. We see Jesus in his humanity give expression to his grief. When he stands before the sealed the tomb, he weeps. This scene should comfort all of us in our moments of grief. Jesus is not far from us. Jesus knows the sorrow, pain, anguish, and confusion of grief that death engenders.

The focus of the story, however, is the dialog between Jesus and the grieving Martha and Mary. It centers around Jesus' invitation to them, even in the face of their loss, to put faith in his word. Faith in the word of Jesus, is ultimately about relationship with him. In the Bible a person's word is more than just a vehicle of communicating information. A person's word embodies their person—a person is their word!

"I (Jesus) am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."

The crucial question for Martha, Mary is: **DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?** Do you take me, Jesus, at my word? We know the response of Martha and Mary. Professing their faith, Martha and Mary invest themselves in Jesus' word, as the divine Spirit/embodied word of Jesus pierces the silence of death and the darkness of the grave restoring to life their formerly dead brother.

St. Paul reminds us that in baptism we received the same Spirit/breath/word which filled the life of Jesus and ultimately raised him from the dead. This divine word gives us comfort now and is our hope for our life following death. **Do we believe this?** At the same time this indwelling Word/breath/Spirit of God is our call to mission. Possessing this word, we are called to bring life to those among us whose lives are marked by death—lost dreams, hopes, plans; a failed marriage; personal bankruptcy; un-or-underemployment; broken relationships with adult children or former friends. Jesus' words uttered by us can be Spirit/breath piercing the darkness of death, bringing life. Consider the divine power in our words the next time we friend, tweet, Instagram or text someone.

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