One of the many joys of being a deacon is baptizing young people. In my ministry at Crucifixion and Holy Cross parishes, I have had the chance to do that twice, most recently a couple of months ago when I baptized a 5 year old boy. When I first met the young fellow, I was wondering how I would be able to complete the baptismal rite as he was a pretty active kid, but when the day of baptism arrived he was a real trooper. He stood there, obviously expecting something important to happen to him, he was very attentive, and when I said it was time to approach the baptismal font he jumped right up on the stool and bent his head over, no coaching needed. The same thing happened at the times for the anointings. He was so proud.

In baptizing that young man, I once again was reminded that each of us in our own baptisms entered into the dying and rising of Jesus, and we received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We hear of these themes so often in our Scriptures at Mass: the themes of: ***the giving of the Spirit*, and *Death and Resurrection.***

We hear from the prophet Ezechiel (Ez 37:12-14) and from St. Paul (Rom 8: 8-11) *“I will put my Spirit within you!”* **The Spirit of Justice; the Spirit of Life; and the** **Spirit of Christ.**

My friends, we have been given a *full measure* of God’s Spirit! We have been given a share in the life of the Trinity! God has put his Spirit within us that we may live, so that we may rise from the dead, so that we may have life and have it to the full. He has not just given us a partial spirit. No! He has given himself to us completely: **The Father’s Spirit of Justice; the Spirit of Jesus the Christ**; **and the Holy Spirit of Life!** The life of the Trinity lives within us because of our baptism. God loves us that much!

We see that God’s Spirit at work in the Gospel account of the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11: 1-45), perhaps the pivotal miracle in Jesus’ entire healing ministry. Jesus hears of the death of his friend Lazarus, but he delays going to him. He waits until the fourth day. Why?

The traditional Jewish belief at the time was that the soul, the spirit of a dead person, remained with the body for three days, after which it departed and the body began to decay and corrupt. Jesus didn’t go right away in order to remove any doubt from the people’s minds that Lazarus was indeed dead. His spirit had left him. He was a hopeless case, they thought. He was too far gone for anything to be done now, they believed. Yes, Jesus waited for the fourth day when the Spirit left, and then he approached the tomb….. and from the depths of his Spirit, he wept. He wept for his friend Lazarus.

As Jesus approached that tomb, he was approaching not only the tomb of Lazarus, but he was approaching in a sense his own tomb, his own death. He was approaching our tombs too. Jesus wept for love of Lazarus. He wept for love of us. He wept in anticipation of the agony he would experience during his Passion and Death.

The people asked, *“Could he not have prevented the death of his friend,* *Lazarus?”* They would ask a similar question as Jesus hung upon the cross, *“He saved others;* *why doesn’t he save himself?”* We ask the same question, don’t we, when someone suffers unjustly. *“Why did God allow this to happen? Why didn’t* *God do something to spare him? Why does God let such bad things happen?”*

The dying and rising of Lazarus prefigures the death and resurrection of Jesus. It prefigures too our suffering, our dying, our death and resurrection.

In this Gospel account, we hear of three commands that Jesus gave to people:

**Roll away the stone!**

**Lazarus! Come out!**

**Unbind him and let him go free!**

Why did Jesus give these commands? He was about to use his divine power to give once again the Spirit to his friend Lazarus. He had the ability to simply will that the stone be moved, that Lazarus come out, and that the bandages and wrappings fall away from his body. But he didn’t do that. He gave these commands to people. Why? I think it was to teach us three important things.

*Roll away that stone!*

***God does not do by a miracle what we, his people, can do by obedience.*** Yes, he could have just willed that stone away, but he wanted their obedience, their cooperation with his plan and his grace. ***We*** have to roll away all that blocks the movement of God in our lives, roll away whatever blocks his grace. We must roll away the barriers, roll away our disobedience, roll away the hardness of our hearts. We must roll away the stone, my friends!

*Lazarus! Come out!*

Can you imagine how difficult it must have been for Lazarus to try to walk out on his own all bound up from head to foot? By commanding Lazarus to come out on his own, we learn that even someone seemingly dead, someone who seems like a lost cause, even that person can do remarkable things to help him or herself. We learn that even those who seem hopeless, they too can be restored and raised up. This is why we believe in death bed conversions. This is why we believe that there is hope for even the most hardened of criminals. By Jesus’ second command, we learn that ***we too must come out of our darkness and*** ***struggle, at times on our own, toward the light, toward life***.

*Unbind him and let him go free!*

Why didn’t Jesus free Lazarus by just willing those bandages to fall away? Because he wanted us to learn that we need others in our lives. Yes we must struggle on our own, do our part to rise again and be free, but in order to be set completely free we need the Church, we need the Body of Christ. ***Freedom comes through the*** ***Church***. I do not know anyone who has gained real freedom on his own. I do not know anyone who has really gotten closer to God by separating himself from the Church. The Church unbinds us, frees us. Through the Church’s ministry we are given life. Without her, we will die a spiritual death.

Yes, my friends, we have been given in our baptism a *full measure* of God’s life and love. We have been given a share in the life of the Trinity. God has put his Spirit within us that we may rise, so that we may live, so that we might have life and have it to the full. The life of the Trinity lives within us and we rise to live again! See how much God loves us!