

The Feast of Pentecost

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Where there is life, there is hope, the saying goes, and it goes way back, back to ancient Rome, where already at least two centuries before our Lord appeared in the flesh Theocritus said, or rather, wrote, that as long as there is life, there is hope, and only the dead have none. Now, that is not necessarily true, although in some ways it is, and whether or not it is true will depend upon from which angle we look at things and exactly what we are talking about.

Death usually has this devastating finality to it; anyone who ever witnessed the frantic attempts to keep somebody alive, who was dying, will have a sense of this, I think. Even though it is sometimes possible for someone technically dead to be *resuscitated*, as it is called in the business, that is: be brought back to life, usually, once a person is dead, our perception is that that is the end, he is beyond hope.

But then, as we have just spent seven weeks celebrating, He is no longer dead who died for the sin of the world, and so it is not true that the dead have no hope, nor is it true that only as long as there is life is there hope; well, again, whether it is true or not will depend upon what we are talking about, that is: what we mean by *dead*, and by *life*.

He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, He says, who died and lives, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die, which means that the dead who believed in Him are not dead, not really, for for those who believe in Him, and who therefore belong to Him, death is something other than what it once was; rather than dying under His judgement unto eternal damnation, His Christians die away only from the sufferings and sorrows of this world into His blessed presence. And where He is, who has overcome death once and for all, there must be life, and life in its fullness, so that death can be no more, and therefore, those whom He has taken to Himself cannot be dead.

And the dead who died in Him still have hope, strange as it may sound; how can they have more to hope for, who are with Him? Well, although they lack nothing, as no one can, whose Shepherd the Lord is, they still have something to which they look forward: they wait for the *fulfilment*, for their bodies to be raised, for the ashes of those burnt to come together again, for the sea to give up the dead who are in it, so that they will finally fully be what God made them to be, as His most beloved creatures, in spirit and in body.

How can we not come to think of this today, as we hear of the vision of the Prophet, how scattered bones came together, bone to bone, and sinews and flesh came upon them, and skin covered them over, and the dead had breath come into them, and lived? Well, I, for one, could not not come to think of it.

When it comes to those, though, who really are dead, it is indeed true that they have no hope, those who would not know of Him who died for them, and lives, and would not have Him give His life to them. What they have before them is but a fearful expectation of judgement and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries, when *the Lord Jesus is revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, as He has had His holy Apostle Paul write of it, to inflict vengeance upon those who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; they will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might.*

But for those who belong to Him, He who died and lives will make all things well; although, I suspect, many of the things He will make well will be well in other ways than we would assume; we who know so little of the wisdom of God, and His glory, what would we know of what it means for all to be well? How could we expect to understand what it would mean for all things to be well, who know only this life of suffering and sorrow and sin, in which we know joy only as a temporary refuge and relief from grief, and good only as a lesser degree of evil? As He who died and lives has had His holy Apostle Paul write it, it is *what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man ever imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him. So there is that.*

As long as there is life, there is hope, the saying goes, and only the dead have none. And still, even we who believe, and know it in faith, that there is hope even when there is no life, and that there always is life, and that even the dead have hope, at least those of the dead who are not really dead, even we might find ourselves without hope in our hearts and minds, even though we know in faith, well, again, all that which we believe. We fall into despair when God does not make things well the way we think He should, and the only way in which we in our wisdom think that things can be well, that is: by us having our way; when what was most precious in life is taken away from us, and all that mattered, and all the good things we still have, and all those who used to be so precious to us whom we still have with us, well, having them with us no longer seems to matter all that much.

In fact, often, as soon it only *seems* that something precious *might* be taken away from us, we not only lose hope, we also abandon the faith. We no longer care about His love, who died for us, and lives, we no longer take it to heart when the promise is spoken to us, for which He suffered so severely, that all will be well for all who believe in Him, and is in fact well already; instead we give ourselves over to that dreadful form of unbelief which is despair, to savour and seek satisfaction in the sour sweetness of self-pity.

What the Prophet saw all around him was utter death, devastation and destruction. The gates of Hell had prevailed over the place God had chosen for His home, where He would have His glory dwell. The people He had chosen for His own, to whom He had given His promises of His peace and His presence had abandoned Him to worship Him their own way, which is to not worship *Him*, and the people was His people no more, and barely a people at all, with no country or even a home of their own.

As long as there is life there is hope, the saying goes, and only the dead have none. But what life can there be, when hope itself has died?

And as in real life, the Prophet saw only death and devastation also in his vision, scattered bones which no longer had life in them, and could not have.

And the Lord God said to him: *Son of man, can these bones live?* Well, the Prophet know way in which how life could come to the dead bones. But he knew better than to blaspheme before God and lecture Him as to what He could and could not do, and what He had to do, and how. His response was the response of faith: *O Lord God, You know.* That is the faith: to entrust all things to God and His goodness, even in the deepest darkness of devastation and death; as He did, who is Himself God from eternity, who gave Himself over to death, and lives.

God entrusted His Prophet with a hopeless task: to command the dead to come alive. And so he did, and so they did, as all the dead shall one day arise from their graves, at His command, who died, and lives.

Now, this is all fine and good. It is, in fact, wonderful, is it not? Well, it is, and we never should forget; nothing is greater than this. Nevertheless, is it not a bit odd, and a bit off, perhaps, that this is what have presented to us today? This is all Easter stuff, and today is Pentecost, and Pentecost is something other than the dead coming alive, is it not? Well, it is, and it is not.

Pentecost is the Feast for our Lord Jesus sending His Holy Spirit upon His Church, so that she could begin her life.

And the reality of Pentecost, and of the life of the Church of Christ, is exactly that of which we hear today; as He had said it already before He died, He who died for us, and now lives: *Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself. And the life the Father has in Himself is the life-giving life of God, and so is the life He has given to the Son from eternity.*

Pentecost is the reality the vision of the Prophet teaches: The men God calls and commands to *prophecy*, that is: to preach His Word, when they speak as He has commanded, the dead do come alive. When the men God has called and commanded to speak speak as He has commanded, it is His own Word they speak; and with His Word He breathes out the Holy Spirit, who is His own life and breath, and who makes sinners to come alive from the death of disobedience and defiance, and also from the death of despair, to live for God, and with Him, to breathe in His life in the Word and worship of His salvation, and allow ourselves to find comfort, even in the gravest grief, in the assurance that we are right with God, and when that is true, well, then all is well, and nothing can not be.

Prophecy to the Breath, the Lord God said to His Prophet, *prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath: 'Thus says the Lord God: "Come from the four winds, O Breath, and breathe upon the slain, that they may live."*' And as His Church proclaims His salvation, she calls upon Spirit of God, and He comes, the Breath and Life of God, and His very innermost self, and so the fullness of God breathes life into those who hear and makes us to surrender to the love of God, and receive His life.

To come to the faith so as to live with God in His Word and worship is nothing less than that, to come alive from death, for the disobedience and defiance we have in us *is* death, and it makes us dead to God. It is to be rescued from the eternal death and despair of Hell unto eternal life with God in the fullness of His joy. And it is to have *His* life living in us already now, who died and lives to give His own heavenly life to us, while we await the day when He shall come in glory to judge the living and the dead, and those who have His life in them shall have died away, fully and finally, from death and finally fully enjoy that fullness of joy which is His heavenly life.

We have seen the true light; we have received the heavenly Spirit; we have found the true faith. Let us worship the undivided Trinity, for *He* has saved us.