Today, in this Holy Gospel, we have heard the last of the baptismal scrutinies. In the scrutinies, the Church tells the catechumens (those preparing to be baptized on the Easter Vigil), what Jesus can do in each of us. So, in the first scrutiny, the catechumens are told that Jesus Christ loves them and wants to heal them. In the second scrutiny, the catechumens are told that Jesus Christ is going to give them a new set of eyes, He is going to give them a vision of an entire new world. And in this third and final scrutiny, the catechumens are told that Jesus Christ is going to do a most dramatic thing. He is going to raise them from the dead and give them the gift of eternal life.

This event of our blessed Lord raising Lazarus from the dead, is the most dramatic of all the miracles he performs. In St. John’s Gospel it occurs at the end of the section known as the Book of Signs; it brings his signs to a fullness and it is the overture (so to speak) to the Book of Glory.


the Jewish understanding was that the first three days of death were an intermediate state, in which the soul stayed close to the body. But after three days, death was final. It’s a bit like Billy Crystal’s routine as Miracle Max when examining the dead body of Wesley in The Princess Bride. “There’s a big difference between mostly dead and all dead!” In this case, Lazarus is all dead.

This miracle is the source and cause of our joy as Christians; because here we see that Jesus has the power to destroy death, the bitter old enemy of humanity, and to give us new life which is unending.

Jesus Christ has and had the power to raise the dead to life. A power that belongs exclusively to God. Who other than God could do this? So the raising of Lazarus helps the catechumens understand that in the sacrament of baptism, they will not only receive eternal life, but will gain the power to die to selfishness and sin and live according to the new life of charity.

This gift of eternal life that is put into the hearts of the baptized by the Holy Spirit. It empowers the newly baptized to die with Christ and to rise with him to new life. The gift of eternal life will only be fully revealed on the last day. When the bodies of the dead will be recreated by the power of Christ and rise from the grave in the pattern of his own risen Body and enjoy the vision of the Trinity in their human flesh.

The Fathers of the Church, St. Augustine among them, in commenting on this Gospel see an image of Jesus and the Church working together to reconcile sinners to God. As a matter of fact, this passage might be the first Gospel text used to explain absolution.

Christ, they say, brings the spiritually dead back to life: that is the baptized person that has destroyed the divine life within them through sin. The Spirit is breathing the risen Christ into him and gives to him sorrow for his sins, the desire to confess the sin, and willingness to make expiation for his sin through penance.

The sin that destroys the grace of baptism is received again. It is a gratuitous gift of the risen Lord. It is the priest representing Christ and representing the Church who unbinds Lazarus and sets him free through Absolution.