“Do not be afraid.” This verse is repeated two times in the Gospel reading tonight and 365 times in the Bible. What is Jesus referring to? Death comes to mind. We are afraid about being a burden to others. We fear the pain that might be involved in dying. We may be fearful of past sins that cannot be undone. We worry if we have done enough to deserve heaven. We may fear the judgment to come or an injustice that we face now. We are full of fears and worries, anxiety and angst.

That is why Jesus’ words are so necessary and comforting. We truly have nothing to fear. Jesus said to Martha, the sister of Mary and Lazarus (whom he raised from the dead): “I 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” (John 11:25-26). When Jesus says that we will never die, it does not mean that our hearts will not stop beating or our brains cease to function. (John’s Gospel always has several layers of meaning.) It means that at the moment of our earthy death, we continue to live in God.

Jesus has promised (John 14:1-3): “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be.” Jesus has had the most remembered death in history. Through his death and resurrection he proved that violence, injustice, and sin will be silenced and overcome. In the graciousness and gentleness he manifested, he proved that anonymity and powerlessness have been turned into immortality and power.

When we close our eyes in death, we will open them to a bright Easter morning. We will hear the Lord say: “Arise, my friend, my beautiful one, and come. For see, the winter is past; the rains are over and gone” (Song of Songs 2:10-11). In the loving union of that encounter, all heartbreak will be redeemed and we will experience perfect joy. Alleluia. Alleluia.

Easter Blessings,

Fr. Kevin MacDonald, C.Ss.R.