

**5th Sunday of Lent**  
**Cycle A**  
**April 9-10, 2011**  
**Saint Margaret Parish, Bel Air**

**Do You Believe?**

Today, the gospel story is about Jesus raising a man named Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus talks about himself as “*the resurrection and the life*” and finally asks Martha, the sister of Lazarus: “*Do you believe?*” And Martha responds: “*Yes, I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God.*”

I suggest Jesus is asking us today: Do you believe? Do you believe?

**Today’s Challenge to Faith**

Believing or faith has become somewhat of a challenge in today’s world.

One of the books that I read while I was on sabbatical is this – *A Secular Age* by Charles Taylor. In this book, Taylor shows how, over the last three hundred years, there has been a drift towards secularism in the western world.

Beginning in the 1700’s, first Europe and then America have grown increasingly centered on our human ability to handle things independently of any God. Taylor shows how we have come from a time where faith and religion and God were intimately tied in with civic and social life.

We have come to a time where faith and religion and God are simply an option, and, they are an option that many people choose to go without. This is what is meant by secularism or secularity or the *Secular Age* – the title of Taylor’s book.

For us Americans, there is another given, another fact that we have to recognize. And that is pluralism.

We live in a very pluralistic society where there are not just different nationalities and races. There are also many different faith traditions and there are value systems that are not rooted in any faith in God.

In this situation, we are led to look at alternatives and to question perhaps more than ever before in history. So, secularism and pluralism – these are facts and in many ways givens especially here in America.

This cultural environment makes faith a challenge today in a way that it was not five hundred years ago. I want to draw two conclusions from this.

**Conclusion 1: Lift Up Our Faith**

First, we need to lift up faith and God and religion.

We need to show the reasonableness of faith in God, for example, through the desire implanted deep within us for something more, something beyond life on this earth. We need to be clear about the gift of knowing about God first through creation and then through the inspired words of Scripture.

We need to show the richness of a life that is lived with the direction and moral compass given to us by God. We need to be clear about the gift of knowing this through Jesus, the Word of God made flesh.

We need to show the benefit of being part of a community of faith, a church. We need to be clear about the comfort of the sacraments – God, Jesus coming to us in ordinary things like bread and wine.

In other words, in our culture, we need to be ourselves as Catholic Christians. But we need to do this humbly, aware of our human deficiencies and respecting others who have a different faith or different values.

### **Conclusion 2 Take People Where They Are**

My second conclusion is that we need to take people where they are.

In this secular and pluralistic culture, we have to expect that most people will search, explore, question and challenge. That is simply the way many of us are and we have to take others where they are.

This culture is why, for example, here at Saint Margaret's we have an RCIA experience that is styled around a search and journey in faith. It is why we our young people in our youth or Confirmation programs have an opportunity to express themselves and question.

This culture is why when people bring their child for baptism, here at Saint Margaret's we welcome them even if their faith practice is not exactly what we would want it to be. We assume sincere, good, core faith in them.

And then, we work together and talk about what a life of faith can mean for this child and for them as a family. And so often, this becomes a spark that enkindles fuller faith and leads to a closer walk with the Lord.

And finally, this culture is why here at Saint Margaret's we welcome couples who come to be married even if their lifestyle is not what the Church would hope for. We express our joy in their decision to be married in the Church, in a ceremony of faith.

And then we offer them a thoughtful wedding preparation and even more important, a thoughtful marriage preparation that will include faith as a bond and strength for married life. And once more, this approach often becomes a spark that enkindles fuller faith and leads to a closer walk with the Lord.

### **Conclusion**

So, all of this from Jesus' question "*Do you believe?*"

In this culture, we need to live our faith and minister as a Church not in a negative or condemning way, but respectfully and positively. We need to greet others not in a way that excludes them but in a way that welcomes and includes.

This is the way to live humbly with the Lord and to invite others to the same joy and peace and comfort that we experience from our practice of faith.