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1] On 13th November 1789, Benjamin Franklin wrote to JeanBaptiste Leroy concerning the newly established American Constitution. Franklin suggested that the Constitution promised to be permanent but then said that, '*In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.*'

2] In fact, the same idea had been expressed earlier. In 1726, the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, Daniel Defoe, had written '*Things as certain as death and taxes, can be more firmly believ'd.*' And before that, in 1716, a writer called Christopher Bullock suggested that, '*Tis impossible to be sure of any thing but Death and Taxes.*'

3] Of course, someone might be very good in avoiding taxes, perhaps with the help of a clever accountant. Or they might, with criminal intent, evade taxes altogether. Yet as for death: one might avoid it for a time, but to evade death? Eventually, it will catch up with you.

4] It came sooner than expected for that young man in the gospel this morning, or rather, death took him sooner than was hoped, leaving behind his poor widowed mother, dependent on the charity of others. On the other hand, there was nothing particularly unusual about an early death in that ancient world. Even until quite recent history, lives cut short at an early age were indeed often expected, despite the best hopes of fond parents. When visiting museums, I have often noticed the tomb markers of people from the Roman period: how young they so often were when death carried them away.

5] There are, it seems then, two strands, two threads, that run through our experience of this life: the predictable and the unexpected; what we know is bound, eventually, to happen, and then the odd encounter, the unexpected; those events that, as we say, come out of the blue.

6] I wonder how often that same scene had been played out in the city of Nain? Just another untimely death, the funeral procession, the wailing mourners, the passers-by, perhaps bothering to pause and reflect on their own mortality for a time and then, the world moves on. The expected; the almost predictable sights of city life.

7] But then! Along comes the unexpected, the surprising, indeed, the unpredictable. This procession of mourners encounters the Christ; they meet the Messiah along the road who give the command, "*Do not weep.*"

8] For once, yet for time only, death is avoided, stepped aside; a delay in the inevitable course of things in this world. The young man is restored to his mother and all is made well. But the time will come again, as it would with Jairus' daughter, as it would with Lazarus of the four days, only, it will be different in that second passing when, once again, the carnal body fails. For them, they would not be passing beyond the veil into the great unknown. For their first rising from the dead was a sign, a miracle, a wonder, prefiguring what is to come.

9] Here is Christ confirming, making real, what was prophesied in the writings of the Old Testament. As we read in Isaiah, '*He will swallow up death forever, And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces... And it will be said in that day: Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us.*' [Is.25:8-9] Here the hope of Job the Long-Suffering is fulfilled: '*For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another.*' [Job 19:25-27]

10] What then of us? All well and good for this young man, for Jairus' daughter and for Lazareth. They knew what lay beyond and could, eventually, pass from this world without fear. The apostles themselves were only called apostles because they had seen with their own eyes the Christ risen from the dead; as Thomas also had

to see and know the resurrection from the dead. But we are those who live by faith: *'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'* [Jn.20:29].

11] Yet have we not been raised from the dead as well? Have we not, unexpectedly, encountered the Christ? What do we believe about our own baptism into Christ's death? In that service the deacon prays for the candidate that he or she *'May be a member and partaker of the death and resurrection of Christ our God.'* For our souls, too, have already encountered that inevitable fact of life; we too have already been raised up. For us, too, the entirely predictable and the completely unexpected have come across one another. *'Mercy and truth have met together,'* says the Psalmist. *'Righteousness and peace have kissed.'* [Ps.84(85):10]

12] St Paul tells us in Colossians, *'If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.'* [Col.3:1-3] There lies the problem, the challenge, for each one of us from now on: Firstly, do we actually believe this and secondly, do we strive to live according to our belief?

13] This has always been the case, if we were baptised in the name of the Holy Trinity, whether as infants or later in life, we encountered then the very same Christ who raised the son of the widow of Nain. And sooner or later each one of us is faced with the same question: where is our real healing to be found? It is not really a once and for all question, though, for many, their conversion to Christ the Redeemer can mark a radical change in their way of life. Still, for all, it is a question that remains before us every day and at every hour. Do we follow God's will in humble obedience; do we repent seeking the mind of Christ; do we long to be preserved from the living death of our habitual sins and come to know, even now, the life of the kingdom of God?

14] Whether in the ordinary, the common, the expected things of daily life, or in the chance encounters, the accidental, the unusual, we need the same resolve: to seek first the kingdom of God to find our true self, our true humanity in the image and likeness of God.

15] Benjamin Franklin was certainly right about taxes and, predictably, we must continue to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's. But as for the other inevitability, in Christ we have already conquered death and *'Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.'* [2 Cor:4:16]

15] The truth is, we bear another image and inscription, of which Caesar can own nothing. As again, in our Rite of Baptism we pray, *'That he who is baptised... may be transformed; that he may put away from him the old man, which is corrupt through the lusts of the flesh, and that he may be clothed upon with the new man, and renewed after the image of Him who created him; that being buried, after the pattern of thy death, in baptism, he may, in like manner, be a partaker of Thy Resurrection.'*

16] No wonder Paul tells us today that we, together, are the temple of God in this world, and that we must *cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God.* We have been bought, we have been redeemed at a price in the blood of Christ. Inasmuch as we have been restored in the image of our Creator, may God give us grace, likewise, to strive after that authentic life, that integral life and our true humanity.