



The 5th Sunday of Lent (A) –March 29, 2020

"Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God!"

Question of the Week: When have you felt the Spirit of the Living God falling afresh on you?

● **First Reading: Ezekiel 37: 12-14**

"I will put my spirit in you that you may live"

● **Responsorial: Psalm 130: 1-8**

R: With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.

● **Second Reading: Romans 8: 8-11**

You are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you

● **Gospel: John 11:1-45**

"I am the resurrection and the life."

Reading 1: Spirit-Renewed Life

Q: How do you find hope in the midst of gloom?

The prophet Ezekiel was a Temple priest when the Babylonians swept the power elite of Jerusalem into exile, about 597 B.C. God called Ezekiel to prophecy through word and deed after his resettlement in modern-day Iraq. While Ezekiel proclaimed a message of extreme doom, he expressed an almost unreal hope in God's power.

The context for these verses is a case in point. 37:1-14 described a vision of a valley full of death. Bones lay everywhere [37:1]. Yet, at the command of the Lord, Ezekiel could prophesy, and the Spirit of the Lord would reconstitute the bones into flesh [37:2-8]. With another prophecy, the Spirit would pour life into the bodies [37:9-10].

37:11-14 connected the vision with the spiritual despair of the Jews in exile. Their hopes could revive through the power of God. What they could not do on their own, God could easily do. While it might seem impossible, like the reconstituting flesh or reanimating a body, God could revive a

people and give them a purpose. He could give them hope!

God commanded Ezekiel to prophecy the spiritual resurrection of the Jews [37:12-14]. But, the prophecy would find another, fuller context. The person of Jesus, the Christ. Through him, followers would find a new hope in a final divine revival. God does and will breathe his Spirit into his people. And, he will give them a new place in his land. He will give them a new hope!

Q: How does God give you hope in your times of darkness?

Responsorial: A Prayer for Forgiveness

Q: When do you seek forgiveness? Why do you seek it?

One definition of arrogance is never seeking forgiveness. The arrogant person thinks he or she is above it all. Of course, none of us is God, we just like to play God. Seeking forgiveness is the way we step back from the arrogance of our self-centered universe and see ourselves as we truly are.

Psalm 130 asks for forgiveness. It is a penitent



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psalm that reaches out to God in hope. Some scholars believe the hymn was a prayer to pre-prepare the worship community to enter the Temple; in other words, the psalm acted as a ritual of spiritual cleansing, much like the washing rituals during the time of Jesus prepared a Jew for communal meals (see John 2:1-12, for example).

The psalm can be divided into three parts: the petition for forgiveness (130:1-4), the call for attentive waiting (130:5-6), and a reminder to the nation of God's covenant (130:7-8). The petition is the most personal part of the psalm, even more personal than many of the other preparation psalms (Psalms 15 and 24). The attitude of the petitioner was not despair but distance. The image in 130:1 put the petitioner "in the depths (of a valley)," whereas YHWH was understood to dwell on the mountaintop (overlooking the depths); the landscape of Palestine with its below sea-level valleys and jutting mountain ranges made the contrast of place dramatic. Yet, even on the mountaintop, YHWH could hear the voice of a sinner so far away. Notice, it is the power of forgiveness that evoked awe (fear of the Lord in 130:4), not divine justice (130:3).

In 130:4-5, the subject shifted from petition to anticipation. The psalmist waited for the presence of the Lord; he anticipated the arrival of YHWH, just as a watchman looked to the arrival of the king at night.

130:5-6 moved the hymn from the personal to the corporate; the subject was not the petitioner but the nation. Israel was to hope in YHWH because of his covenant (i.e., loving kindness). But, the subject (repeated twice in 130:7b, then 130:8) looped back to the petition of 130:4; just as the petitioner asked for forgiveness, so the nation will be pardoned.

At some point in life, we need to step back from our egos to make things right with others. Forgiveness is the means we use to reestablish relationships. When we ask God for forgiveness, we are seeking a fresh start, a new balance. Unlike the uncertainty with human relations, we can be confident that God will hear our plea, accept our humble hearts, and give us a spirit of yearning for his presence.

Q: How have you prayed for forgiveness? How has God heard your prayer?

Reading 2: Too Tired? Wake Up!

Q: Have you ever tried to do the right thing, but it backfired on you? Why did that happen?

Sorry. My source had no analysis of this reading.

Q: When have you felt lifted by God from depression or discouragement? How did that affect your faith?

Gospel: Hope in a Time of Loss

Q: What was the last funeral you attended? Was the deceased close to you? Did you need time to grieve?

In spite of all our efforts, we cannot escape death. How we face death, however, can help determine our quality of life. Does the end of life give us despair or hope? In the story of Lazarus, John challenges us to see hope in death through the eyes of faith.

The narrative about the resurrection of Lazarus stood out as the premier miracle before the Passion. John crafted the story to remove any doubt in the power of Jesus. And to present the reader with a real challenge of faith in God's Son.

11:4 "This illness will not (lead) to death, but (is) for the glory of God." This illness of Lazarus would lead to his death. But, implicitly, it would also lead to the death of Jesus. The death of both men would result in the glory of God, their resurrections. Hence, the phrase had a double meaning (Lazarus and Jesus).

"so that the Son of God might be glorified through it." The phrase "through it" can have a double meaning: the illness and the glory of God. John could have meant both meanings.

11:20 "But Mary sat at home." Sitting was the traditional posture of mourning and comforting in the ancient world.



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11:26 "Everyone living and trusting me does not die in the (final) age." This sentence has two areas that need explanation. First, "living" could refer to physical life or spiritual life. In the first case, the translation could read "every-one living (today) and believing in me." In the second case, "living" and "believing" were synonymous.

"...does not die in the (final) age." The "(final) age" referred to the Second Coming and was equivalent to eternal life.

11:27 "You are the Christ, the Son of God, the One coming into the world." The three titles in this verse summarized the gospel writer's view of Jesus: the Messiah, the Son who had a unique relationship with God the Father, and the Word who came into the world.

11:33b This verse is difficult to understand, especially considering the context. The Greek clearly showed that Jesus was angry -- but at whom? In 11:33a, Jesus saw Martha and the others weeping in sincere and in ritual mourning. He reacted with anger and a troubled heart. Why did Jesus react in this way to a situation that was culturally appropriate? Was he angry at the crowd's lack of faith? Or was he angry at death itself? The verse and context do not explain. Yet, to translate the verse as "deeply moved" does not seem to do justice to the language. Angry and a troubled heart seemed to be the catapult to the question in 11:34 and the eventual resurrection of Lazarus (see 11:38).

11:35 Unlike the cultural wailing expressed in 11:33a, Jesus simply shed tears. (For you trivia buffs, this is the shortest verse in the Bible.)

11:39 "for it is the fourth" The word "fourth" is an adjective that can refer to the day of the dialogue ("it is the fourth day") or to Lazarus ("he is a fourth day man"). The translation above used the former meaning.

11:43 "Lazarus! (Come) out here!" Jesus' command to Lazarus was literally two adverbs ("here out"). As the passage began, Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, sent Jesus an urgent note about his grave illness. [11:3] The note revealed their faith in Jesus only as a healer.

Jesus responded with a statement of faith. The illness would not lead to death, but to God's glory and the glory of his Son. [11:4] In this sense, death meant the final end of existence. Jesus inferred death would not end existence for Lazarus or himself. No, even through sickness and death, people would praise God and his Son. Death would lead to new life.

To make his point, Jesus delayed a few more days, in spite of his love for the family. By the time he arrived, Lazarus had been buried for four days. [11:5, 17] Many Jewish rabbis held a soul hovered near the body for three days; beyond the third day, there was no hope of reviving the corpse.

When Martha heard Jesus was coming, she left her home (the customary place of grieving) to meet him. As she greeted Jesus, she believed in him only as a healer. Yes, placed her faith in Jesus and in his relationship with the Father. God still worked through Jesus. But, only if things were different... When Jesus announced Lazarus would rise again, Martha responded with an answer many Jews at the time of Jesus held; Lazarus would indeed rise on the Day of Judgment. [11:21-24] She could not see beyond her assumptions.

Jesus, then, revealed himself to Martha: "I AM the resurrection and the life." Just as he identified himself to the Samaritan woman in John 4:26, Jesus used the phrase "I AM" to denote his own divinity and his relationship to the Father. He was God and he was God's instrument.

Jesus directed his identity toward the subject at hand. "I AM the resurrection and the life." Those who entrust themselves to Jesus will never see spiritual death. In spite of physical death, they will always have life in Christ. (Perhaps, we should reverse the phrase. In Christ, we have eternal life now that will bring us to resurrection). In 11:23 Jesus inferred Lazarus had eternal life because he would be raised. Did Martha entrust herself to Jesus, so she, too, could have life? [11:25-26] Yes, Martha believed. She saw Jesus was more than a mere healer. In Jesus, she experienced God.



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She professed Jesus to be the Messiah, the One promised in the Scripture. [11:27]

But, Mary and the others did not understand. Their sorrow moved Jesus, but their immature faith angered him (see 11:32 for Mary's reaction; 11:37 for the crowd's reaction). At this point, Jesus felt sorrow for the loss of his friend and indignation at the crowd. [11:33-38]

At the tomb, Jesus ordered the stone to the tomb rolled away. Martha objected with the obvious. There would be a stench. Jesus countered with question of faith. Instead of odor, Martha would see God's glory through eyes of faith. [11:39-41] After the stone was removed, Jesus thanked the Father for their relationship. The Father (always) listened to Jesus. (He repeated the phrase "listen to me" twice). In Greek, "listen to" projected as sense outside of time, in the realm of the eternal. Throughout time, the Father heard the request of the Son. Jesus prayed, not for his own benefit, but for the faith of his audience. [11:41-42]

Jesus gave two orders: first, that Lazarus to come out and, second, that the crowd to untie his burial cloth. [11:43-44] In these two orders, Jesus showed his faith in the Father was certain. Those who trusted Jesus could share in that certainty. Those in Christ would have a life that led to resurrection

Catechism Themes: Christ's Resurrection and Ours (CCC 992-1004)

When he created humanity, God sowed the seeds of salvation, specifically, the resurrection. Over the time, we have come to realize God wants more for us, his creatures, than a transient nature. He wants us to live with him as he created us, body and soul. As Christ rose from the dead, he became a sign of our destiny and a pledge of God's will for us. More important, when we join ourselves to Christ, we share in the power of his resurrection. Like the "here.. but not yet" nature of God's Kingdom, we experience rising from spiritual death every time we reconcile with Christ and join intimately with him in the Eucharist. Yet, our physical resurrection is to come.

"What is rising?" When we rise from the dead, we will be made permanently whole, body and spirit, never to die again.

"Who will rise?" The blessed will see God forever while the damned will eternally reject his presence. "How?" We will rise in the same way Christ rose, through the same power of his resurrection. Our lowly bodies will become "spiritual." While we do not know the specifics of this new life, we can rest assured in the knowledge it will happen.

"When?" We will rise on the last day, when Christ will return to judge all humanity.

Because God will raise our bodies up on the last day, our bodies are the vessels of salvation. To show our faith in Christ, we wash our bodies in the waters of Baptism and nourish them with the Bread of Life at Eucharist. In these ways, our bodies partake in their future glory, here and now. Thus we should show respect to our bodies and to others', especially the weak and the suffering. And we should honor the bodies of the dead who live with the Lord.

Q: How can faith strengthen you in your loss? Do you know of anyone who has lost a loved one and who has become stronger because of faith?

The loss of a loved one can bring despair in the loss, or it can bring hope found in the resurrection. Our hope depends upon our faith in Christ. Is our faith active, seeking a closer walk with the Lord? Or, is the Lord at a comfortable distance of our choosing? Remember, how we live reflects how we view death.

Q: Does the idea of death inspire faith or doubt? Share your answer with the Lord.