

Fifth Sunday of Lent Year A

Summary by Dale J. Sieverding: Raising a man from the dead had not been done. Claiming to be THE resurrection and the life...that was new. In the dregs of sin and death, depression and spiritual and/or physical sickness, Jesus calls us to new life, to 'be free' and know his abundant power. The Elect are constantly hearing and seeing examples of the Lord's power in the life of the faith community, and whether it is easy for her, or a challenge for him, asks for the same action in the life of the Elect. They are 'sacraments' of conversion for the community, so much so that, should people opine, "more is required of them than of 'us'," the pastoral minister should challenge that person to fully live the gospel of Jesus. A full embrace of Christ and his victory over sin and death will be anything but easy, and the Elect may actually make your community more committed to entering into and living the paschal mystery.

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First Reading Ezekiel 37:12-14

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

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel

Thus says the Lord God:

O my people, I will open your graves
and have you rise from them,
and bring you back to the land of Israel.

Then you shall know that I am the Lord,
when I open your graves and have you rise from them,
O my people!

I will put my spirit in you that you may live,
and I will settle you upon your land;
thus you shall know that I am the Lord.

I have promised, and I will do it, says the Lord.

The word of the Lord

Ezekiel 37:12-14 Commentary by Deacon Owen Cummings:

Ezekiel is the first of the exilic prophets of the sixth century, deported to Babylon, and spent the greater part of his preaching ministry in that country. The people are in a situation of pervasive discouragement in Babylon: they are without king, without land, without temple. It is all gone. In chapters 33-39 of the book Ezekiel prophesies the redemption and the reconstitution of the exiled people. Ezekiel counsels and exhorts the exiles, he gives them hope. The hope he gives them is God's promise to act, and his hope reaches its climax in this "Vision of the Dry Bones," of which our reading is the last few verses. God will bring the exiles home, and give them their land. God will put his spirit in them so that they will live with the spirit, the breath of God. This is the last Sunday of the Scrutinies for the elect, as they prepare for the Easter Vigil and coming into the Church. The Church is their homecoming, their land, the body in which God will breathe his spirit. The elect will truly be alive when they breathe with the breath of God.

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Responsorial Psalm Psalm 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

℟(7) With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD;
LORD, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to my voice in supplication.

If you, O LORD, mark iniquities,
LORD, who can stand?
But with you is forgiveness,
that you may be revered.

I trust in the LORD;
my soul trusts in his word.
More than sentinels wait for the dawn,
let Israel wait for the LORD.

For with the LORD is kindness
and with him is plenteous redemption;
and he will redeem Israel
from all their iniquities.

Psalm 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8 Summary by John Paul Heil: Main Theme: God's promised FORGIVENESS instills us with patient HOPE for LIFE.

This penitential psalm of lament portrays the psalmist as urgently and passionately crying out to God from "out of the depths"--the realm of misery, dark despair, and death. Thus, this psalm appropriately accompanies today's first reading from Ezekiel in which God promises to return the chosen people of Israel, dead in the "depths" of their graves in exile, to the promised land that they may live again. It prepares us for today's second reading from Romans in which Paul promises that the God who raised Christ from the "depths" of death will also give life to our mortal bodies destined for the "depths" of death because of sin. And it anticipates today's gospel reading in which Jesus calls Lazarus back to life from the "depths" of death in his tomb.

The psalmist places complete trust in God's promised word of forgiveness, exhorting the people of Israel, mired in the dark depths of despair due to their sinfulness, to patiently wait for the Lord more than sentinels wait for the first rays of light at dawn. We are invited to share the psalmist's patient hope that God, because of his merciful kindness and forgiveness, will deliver us from the iniquities that lead to the dreadful despair of death in the "depths."

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Second Reading Romans 8:8-11

The Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Brothers and sisters:

Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh;

on the contrary, you are in the spirit,
if only the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

But if Christ is in you,

although the body is dead because of sin,
the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

If the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,

the One who raised Christ from the dead

will give life to your mortal bodies also,

through his Spirit dwelling in you.

The word of the Lord

Romans 8:8-11 Commentary by Deacon Owen Cummings: What Ezekiel promised the Jewish exiles come to fruition here. God's words, "I will put my spirit in you that you may live," are now reality. We are left in no uncertain terms about the Christian reality in this passage from Romans. For St. Paul there are two ways of existing, "in the flesh" or "in the spirit." Fleshly existence is egocentric existence, while spiritual existence is life in God's Spirit. Literally, the Spirit of God dwells in the baptized. The breath of God is breathed by the baptized. Since God's Spirit breathed Jesus from death to life, the same Spirit breathes us to life also in baptism. It is like a new creation. Just as God breathed life into the nostrils of Adam in Genesis 2.7, and Adam became a living being, so God breathes his own Holy Breath into the baptized, and they become by grace the Body of Christ. The baptized are divinized by this Holy Breath-Spirit dwelling within them. St. Symeon, the "New Theologian" (949-1022), the Byzantine mystic, put it in a very practical way like this: "Poor

creature though I be, I am the hand and the foot of Christ. I move my hand and my hand is wholly Christ's hand, for deity is become inseparably one with me. I move my foot, and it is aglow with God." Those who at Easter Vigil will be in-breathed by God, and become Christ's Body, are truly "aglow with God."

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Gospel Acclamation John 11:25a, 26

I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord;
whoever believes in me will never die.

Gospel (longer form) John 11:1-45

I am the resurrection and the life.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

Now a man was ill, Lazarus from Bethany,
the village of Mary and her sister Martha.
Mary was the one who had anointed the Lord with perfumed oil
and dried his feet with her hair;
it was her brother Lazarus who was ill.
So the sisters sent word to Jesus saying,
"Master, the one you love is ill."
When Jesus heard this he said,
"This illness is not to end in death,
but is for the glory of God,
that the Son of God may be glorified through it."
Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.
So when he heard that he was ill,
he remained for two days in the place where he was.
Then after this he said to his disciples,
"Let us go back to Judea."
The disciples said to him,
"Rabbi, the Jews were just trying to stone you,
and you want to go back there?"
Jesus answered,
"Are there not twelve hours in a day?"

If one walks during the day, he does not stumble,
because he sees the light of this world.
But if one walks at night, he stumbles,
because the light is not in him."
He said this, and then told them,
"Our friend Lazarus is asleep,
but I am going to awaken him."
So the disciples said to him,
"Master, if he is asleep, he will be saved."
But Jesus was talking about his death,
while they thought that he meant ordinary sleep.
So then Jesus said to them clearly,
"Lazarus has died.
And I am glad for you that I was not there,
that you may believe.
Let us go to him."
So Thomas, called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples,
"Let us also go to die with him."

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus
had already been in the tomb for four days.
Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, only about two miles away.
And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary
to comfort them about their brother.
When Martha heard that Jesus was coming,
she went to meet him;
but Mary sat at home.
Martha said to Jesus,
"Lord, if you had been here,
my brother would not have died.
But even now I know that whatever you ask of God,
God will give you."
Jesus said to her,
"Your brother will rise."
Martha said to him,
"I know he will rise,
in the resurrection on the last day."
Jesus told her,
"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.
Do you believe this?"
She said to him, "Yes, Lord.
I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God,
the one who is coming into the world."

When she had said this,
she went and called her sister Mary secretly, saying,
"The teacher is here and is asking for you."
As soon as she heard this,
she rose quickly and went to him.
For Jesus had not yet come into the village,
but was still where Martha had met him.
So when the Jews who were with her in the house comforting her
saw Mary get up quickly and go out,
they followed her,
presuming that she was going to the tomb to weep there.
When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him,
she fell at his feet and said to him,
"Lord, if you had been here,
my brother would not have died."
When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her
weeping,
he became perturbed and deeply troubled, and said,
"Where have you laid him?"
They said to him, "Sir, come and see."
And Jesus wept.
So the Jews said, "See how he loved him."
But some of them said,
"Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man
have done something so that this man would not have died?"

So Jesus, perturbed again, came to the tomb.
It was a cave, and a stone lay across it.
Jesus said, "Take away the stone."
Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him,
"Lord, by now there will be a stench;
he has been dead for four days."
Jesus said to her,
"Did I not tell you that if you believe

you will see the glory of God?"
So they took away the stone.
And Jesus raised his eyes and said,
"Father, I thank you for hearing me.
I know that you always hear me;
but because of the crowd here I have said this,
that they may believe that you sent me."
And when he had said this,
he cried out in a loud voice,
"Lazarus, come out!"
The dead man came out,
tied hand and foot with burial bands,
and his face was wrapped in a cloth.
So Jesus said to them,
"Untie him and let him go."

Now many of the Jews who had come to Mary
and seen what he had done began to believe in him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Lectionary for Mass in the Dioceses of the United States of America, volume I Copyright © 1970, 1997, 1998 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

John 11:1-45 Commentary by John Paul Heil: Main Theme:
BELIEVING in Jesus gives us ETERNAL LIFE.

This dramatic story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead serves as a counter symbol for the resurrection of Jesus. That Lazarus was already dead for four days underlines that this is not merely a revival but a resuscitation to life of one who was truly dead. But the "four days" also stand in contrast to the "three days" that Jesus is truly dead before his resurrection and begins to hint at the fundamental difference between them. When Jesus called Lazarus from the tomb, his hands and feet were still bound with burial bands and his face was still wrapped in a burial cloth, symbolically indicating that, although he has been restored to life, he is destined to die again--he is still bound by the power of death. But the risen Jesus left behind in his tomb the burial cloths that bound him in death (20:5-7),

symbolically indicating that his resurrection signifies the definitive victory over the power of death--he (unlike Lazarus) is no longer bound by the power of death and will never die again.

The resuscitation of Lazarus from death invites us to believe in Jesus as “the resurrection and the life”--the one who offers us a share in his victory over the bonds of death in an eternal life with its future and present dimensions. Whoever believes in Jesus has the hope that he “will live” eternal life in the future after he has died physically. And whoever “lives and believes” in Jesus “will never die” spiritually in this life but will live even now the eternal life that continues after our physical death.

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