
Fifth Sunday of Lent

Readings

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.

R./ Thanks be to God.

R. 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.

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

If you, O LORD, mark iniquities,
LORD, who can stand?

But with you is forgiveness,
that you may be revered.

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

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

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

For with the LORD is kindness
and with him is plenteous redemption;
And he will redeem Israel

from all their iniquities.

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

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.

R./ Thanks be to God.

I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord;

whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will never die.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

R./ Glory to you, O Lord

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 him 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

R./ Thanks be to God.

Homily

Today’s theme highlights the power of Life over Death. Obviously, this core tenant of our faith brings great consolation when we think of the death of a loved one, and may even have special meaning in this time of uncertainty about our future. Over the coming months, we will contemplate the many ways our lives have changed due to the devastation of the coronavirus pandemic, and will continue to change even after the immediate threat is gone.

Sometimes the Resurrection of Jesus is too big for us to wrap our minds around, and so Sacred Scripture gives us an alternative to think about. Lazarus does not experience resurrection as we will experience it at the end of our lives: with a glorified body, hopefully rejoicing with all the Saints in Heaven, but he undergoes resuscitation, a passage from death, not to new life in Christ, but to our continued earthly existence. Truly, the Gospel uses this event as a metaphor for Resurrection, but it has another meaning for us here and now.

Many aspects of our life mimic death: losing a job, moving out of town, leaving home for the first time. Some of these experiences bring along with them joy: finding a new job, making new friends and encountering a new community, going to college or starting a career. These transitions also show the power of life over death, joy over sorrow. The story of Lazarus reminds us that change can be painful, but it can also be a blessing.

When we walk through the desert of Lent, we remember the pain of change in our life, both in the past and in the present. We can use the memory of past changes and their ultimate outcomes to reassure ourselves that the changes of today will not end in disaster; just as God was with us then, he is with us now. Several years ago, the phrase “this too shall pass” engaged society’s imagination. It is a quick summary of the power of life over death, the power of restoration over damage. No matter how bad life seems today, tomorrow will be better. As Christians, we rely not only on the healing power of time, but also on the eternal love of God.

The prophet Ezekiel ministered to his fellow Jewish exiles in Babylon. When all hope seemed lost, he was the voice of God telling them to not give up. Just as they underwent one of the worst things that could happen to them: the defeat and deportation from their homes to a foreign land, so we today are facing a great calamity: a global pandemic. God's message of hope, that even death does not have the last word, reminds us that he can also calm our fears and restore our fortunes if we have patience and faith.

Let us not fall into despair, but turn to the Lord Jesus, who not only rose from the dead himself, but also lifts us up out of our graves of doubt and anxiety, placing his spirit in us so that we many live!