

Cycle A Fifth Sunday of Lent (3rd Scrutiny)

Reading 1, Ez 37:12-14

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.

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

R. (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.

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.

Reading II, Rm 8:8-11

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.

Gospel, Jn 11:1-45 or 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45

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.

In today's Gospel, why did Jesus wait for two days after hearing that His beloved friend Lazarus was sick? What was the story about walking in the light of day really about? Why was Jesus so disturbed and troubled to the point of weeping? Today's Scriptures tell us that God loves us so much that He promised and then He did it. Jesus said, *"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 we believe this? If so, then why do we have so many questions?

Did you know that when Catholic Churches, like St. Andrew, celebrate the OCIA Rite of Scrutiny, we read these Scriptures from cycle A for 3 Sundays, even when we are in Cycle B rotation of Scripture, like next year, or Cycle C in 2 years' time. 2 weeks ago we read the Samaritan woman at the well; Last week the man born blind was read; and Today it's the story of Lazarus. The three Gospels represent a progression of themes from personal sin (of the Samaritan woman), to communal sin (of the people who berated the man born blind), to God's cycle of life-death-life (in the Lazarus story). The Rites of Scrutiny happening on Sunday are a major way that we the Church assist the OCIA catechumens in their conversion process during Lent. These ancient texts express the beliefs we hold true as Catholic Christians and through them we are handing on our tradition.

To scrutinize something means to examine it closely. But it is not us the community scrutinizing these catechumens; rather, each catechumen scrutinizes their own life and opens themselves for God to scrutinize them...and to heal them.

The elect, however, are not the only sinners in our midst who need conversion and transformation, are they? Each one of us are called to continuing conversion and transformation throughout our lives. So we join with the elect in scrutinizing our own lives and praying to God for the grace to overcome the power of sin that still infects our hearts. We choose to reject evil and accept the salvation granted us through God's

infinite love...not to earn His favor...we already have that...rather to express our gratitude by sharing His love by serving others.

The Scriptures today are about life and death. There are few things in our lives that will challenge and overwhelm our faith like death does. We think we have more time. When it strikes, even when we think we are prepared, it can crush us with sadness. It looks like death won. Grief is the most solitary human emotion I think we will ever have ...it makes islands of us all...It was no different for Jesus. When confronted with death even Jesus became disturbed and deeply troubled as any human would. "And Jesus wept." This is a picture of Jesus we do not ordinarily see. He knew what was coming in the days ahead.

In today's Gospel, Saint John placed the raising of Lazarus at a crucial point in Jesus' life. He had performed 6 other miracles and was now on his final journey to Jerusalem. Unlike the other synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, in the Gospel of John, Jesus begins His Passion with the story of raising Lazarus. The sensation created by Jesus bringing Lazarus' back to life sets in motion the community's celebration on Palm Sunday...and then the leaders' condemnation that lead to His brutal scourging and crucifixion.

But, as the 1st reading said, God promised and He did it ...He opened the graves and put a spirit into us so that we might live...His Holy Spirit dwelling within us since our Baptism gives us life. Jesus waited until there would be no doubt that Lazarus was dead. And then He raised him from death into life so that we would understand and believe that He is the resurrection and the life...that He is God always shining the light for us to follow.

(Rain Down softly begins playing)

On this 5th Sunday of Lent we are all asked to believe, to trust a promise made to us, that even though we suffer and die, we will come back to life in the love of Christ

who is our resurrection. If we live and die in that belief, then it is with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus; with the ancient prophets, Apostles and saints; with innocent people caught in war, taken in the prime of their lives; with lost souls who suffered without hope; with babies aborted or miscarried before they could live; with our loved ones who are gone, but not forgotten....with all of these people who we pray with daily...if we live and die in the belief that we live in God's love, nothing of their goodness and grace will be lost and forgotten in a grave somewhere.

In the OCIA process and as we age, our faith in Jesus becomes more fully developed...it enables us to confront physical death with a confidence that eternal life is not simply a pledge of resurrection on the Last Day sometime in the future. Jesus promises us that our God is not a God of the dead, but the God of the living. He knows and we believe that Eternal Life with God is a reality. We have no reason to fear death because God's love for us never ends! Death never wins!

Our God-given gift of faith and the Holy Spirit facilitate us to participate in life as the transformed Body of Christ with a very much alive, Risen Christ...Yes, here in the Word of God, in Confession, with the Holy Eucharist from His Altar of consecration, and importantly, as His hands and feet and heart out in the world....wherever we go serving others, seeing His face in those who don't feel the love of God, in those who suffer without hope....Now, at this moment...His Kingdom exists...and will forever more! Because only God can transform death into life. He promised we would never die...and then...He made it happen!

And the Church says, AMEN

(the choir/cantor sings Rain Down refrain twice)