

Homily For the 5th Sunday of Lent - Year A
St. Peter's 5:00pm/8:00am Sunday Masses - March 26, 2023

Ezekiel 37:12-14 " Thus says the Lord God: "I am going to open your graves, bringing you up from them."

Psalms 130:1-8 "For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem."

Romans 8:8-11 "Christ will give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwells in you."

John 11:1-45 "Jesus said to them: Unbind him and let him go."

Thirst, Sight, Life

Introduction

Are you following along with Lent? No one *has* to do that. But it is offered to us through the liturgical year. This is the best time of the year. There is nothing like it. I didn't always know that, but the first time I put even a little bit of effort just trying to get into the season, to go with Jesus into the desert, to be tempted with him, unlike him often failing to resist temptation. The first time I really took seriously these forty days to prepare for Easter, I was overwhelmed with the joy of that great celebration. I believe it is worth every bit of the effort we put into it.

We know that children love Christmas, not just for the gifts but for the whole experience. And, being children, they love the Christmas story. I don't mean Santa Clause. I mean the real meaning of Christmas story. The God who made us becomes one with us, born as a vulnerable child. The children get it.

At Easter, Jesus will again become vulnerable, but this time not as a baby, which is easy for the children to relate. The children also love Easter but, sadly, they mostly love the bunny rabbit image. They can be taught what happened on the first Easter, but this is where adult understanding has to come in. It's our job wherever it comes up to explain to those beautiful innocent children what happens to Jesus: what jealousy, what hatred, what pride what evil ... overcomes the one who comes from God, who is the ultimate man of goodness, who will even offer blessing to those who hate him.

Sometimes I need it explained to me why this world tends to hate God, and those who believe in him. We adore pop singers, sports greats. When that's not enough we create superheroes. But God is the one who is greatness itself. I suppose we prefer the ones that we create, because we tend to make our superheroes in our own image. But that kind of greatness is nothing compared to what Jesus offers us. It was true in his day and it's true in ours.

The readings today are another reminder that there is a greater story going on, a greater glory. It's the great story of salvation history. All the bible stories. All the human stories, both real and made up, are in some way trying to grab on to the great story of salvation, in which God has made us to receive blessing, to receive himself.

Ezekiel

For Israel, it was the land that signified the presence of God. Abraham was promised a people and a land. Whenever the people were in the land, they perceived that God was with them. The exile into Babylon is this great gaping wound in their psyche because they were taken from the land. They literally lost God, or so they thought. In exile, they gradually came to learn that God wasn't so fragile or limited. He would be a limited God if he could only act on behalf of his people in Israel but those borders do not contain him.

NHL coach, Harry Neale, was reflecting on his time as the Vancouver Canucks head coach during what may have been a historically bad year. Neale was at a loss for what to do about it. Listen to his comment: "We couldn't win on the road, and we couldn't win at home. My greatest failing as a coach was that I couldn't find anywhere else for us to play." I love that saying of his because it reflects the futility of success being associated with geography.

That was the situation with the people of Israel. However, they learned through suffering. They learned that, with the realization of their sin as the cause of their exile, God was with them in a way they couldn't have imagined before. They just needed to recognize their need for repentance, to come back into right relationship. God could restore their joy, and the deepest aspects of their life.

The image of Ezekiel is one of being raised from the dead, but not just recently dead. "Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live." God will bring them back to the land. But they don't have to wait until then to have God. They start with repentance and prayer. That's what we do in Lent. We get back to the land God made us for by recognizing where we have moved away from God. God does not move away from us.

Romans

In the great story, we begin to see that God's spirit doesn't dwell in a land. It dwells within the people. Finally, when Jesus comes, he is personally present to all who meet him, whether he is walking in the land of Israel, or outside of the boundaries, and whether with only the Israelites or also with the other nations around.

St. Paul tells us: Brothers and sisters. If the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through this Spirit that dwells in you.

John

Now we come to this event where we see that Jesus is the God who can instill his living spirit where one is only a decaying body. This series of gospel readings from two weeks ago, to last week, to this week, are the most powerful series of readings of the liturgical year through which we can understand the way John wants us to understand Jesus.

Two weeks ago, Jesus met a Samaritan woman at a well. Through that remarkable conversation they had, Jesus shows the woman, who is us, that he is the living water for our thirst. Last week, he healed a man born blind, later declaring: "I am the light of the world." He is our light. It is only in him that we can see properly what is good and holy.

Living water in a desert. Vision where none is possible. And now resurrection where death looks to be in charge. Today, Jesus raises a man who is dead. Lazarus is not just a little dead. Jesus waits four days. There was apparently a belief that the soul kind of hung around a person for three days after they had died. Four days meant that this person was as dead as dead can be. What do we see and hear? Jesus weeps, the shortest verse in the bible. He experiences the fullness of human compassion. He is not pretending. He is not saying, well I'm going to raise him from the dead so no need to be sad. He enters right into the grief of the friends and family of Lazarus.

Have you grieved over the loss of someone dear? Or perhaps some dream has been crushed and you feel a kind of death within you. Jesus enters into our grief. Every person who has lost something or someone dear to them. Jesus weeps for us in our loss. But he also weeps for us because we are not fully alive in God. We don't know what joy wants for us. We crush the spirit of God in ourselves and in the hearts of those around us. God weeps with us and for us. That's the remarkable thing about our God. This is proof of the meaning of the incarnation. He doesn't just appear like us. He takes on everything about us except us in all things but sin. And even then, he fully takes on our sin on the cross, as if they were his sins. This is how close our God is to us.

We can't really appreciate this truth unless we believe. Martha says to him, "Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But Jesus answers her: "Do you believe?" Yes, she says. Yes, I believe. Jesus tells Martha and each of us here today: "Those who believe in me, even though they die, they will live. And everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." What does that mean?

Brothers and sisters, God has opened the graves of all our deaths. Our wounded relationship is being healed. Jesus Christ did not mind the four days the body of Lazarus spent in the grave.

Resurrection is the victory of Christ and the joy of Christians. Ezekiel is a great promise. Accomplished in Jesus Christ. He is close to Jerusalem. Stays a few more days. That's odd. He is too late. He could have healed him. But Jesus tells us that

God can solve problems on the other side of death as well. We will all die, so this gives us hope. When a loved one dies, it is not the end of hope. Martha: I know he will rise on the last day. Jesus: I am the resurrection and the life. He is the source of all life. Do you believe that Jesus is the Lord of life? Can we trust him to raise us to life. First he prays to the father, which is what he does at the Eucharist, which is about the resurrection. He gives thanks that the Father will raise him from the dead. This event prepares us for the resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Call To Conversion

The time to embrace being born again is coming in two weeks. We still have two weeks to prepare ourselves to drink the living water for our thirsty souls, to receive light for our blind eyes and hearts, and now to receive resurrected life where death has overcome us. Believe in the resurrection of Jesus and the life he offers us. Jesus commands, "Take away the stone. Untie him and let him go."

Redemption has freed us from the chains of sin, which has caused spiritual death in all of us. As Christians, we are called, even on this earth, to live this new supernatural life that makes us capable of giving new meaning to death, and bearing witness to life. Jesus invites us to come out of the tomb, whatever is limiting the life of God in us: 'Come out!', he says to us. It is an invitation to true freedom.

Drink the living water.

Come out into the light.

Receive new life in Christ.

Do that today. Tell everyone to get ready for a new Easter.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *From the deceitful and cunning rescue me, for you, O God, are my strength.*

Collect: *By your help, Lord our God, may we walk eagerly in that same charity with which, out of love for the world, your son handed himself over to death.*

Ezekiel: *Thus says the Lord God: "I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you back to the land of Israel. and you shall know that I am the Lord. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil. then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act."*

Psalms: *Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Hear my voice. If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered. For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.*

Romans: *Brothers and sisters. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if Christ is in you, through the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through this Spirit that dwells in you.*

John: *Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴ But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it." ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So when he heard that he was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go into Judea again." ⁸ The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any one walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. ¹⁰ But if any one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." ¹¹ Thus he spoke, and then he said to them, "Our friend Laz'arus has fallen asleep, but I go to awake him out of sleep." ¹² The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." ¹³ Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Laz'arus is dead; ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶ Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."*

¹⁷ Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary sat in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you

believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world."

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying quietly, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹ And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² Then Mary, when she came where Jesus was and saw him, fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled; ³⁴ and he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. ⁴² I knew that thou hearest me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that thou didst send me." ⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." ⁴⁵ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him;