

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD**  
**in**  
**THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY**  
**Fifth Sunday of Lent**  
**March 26, 2023**

**READINGS FROM THE LECTIONARY:**

Ezekiel 37:12-14	God will restore Israel to life and to land.
Romans 8:8-11	The Spirit in us grants resurrection already.
John 11:1-45	Jesus gives new life to Lazarus who had died.

**BIBLE BACKGROUND:**

**John:**

In Matthew, Mark and Luke, the final event that turned the officials of the Jewish nation against Jesus was the “cleansing of the Temple,” when Jesus drove the moneychangers and other traders from the Temple area. This was the “last straw.” In John’s Gospel, the event that finally brought the officials to decide they had to deal with Jesus was the raising of Lazarus back to life. The community for which John wrote considered the Lazarus story so decisive that they saw it as the hinge upon which turned all subsequent events in the witness they gave to Jesus Christ. Here, finally, is the manifestation of the One who was their hope for new life in God. This Gospel passage brings to a climax the hope of the catechumens as they draw nearer and nearer to the day when they too will enter the “tomb” of baptism and be called by Christ to live a new life.

Lazarus was truly dead. There could be no doubt about that. People who had died were normally buried within 24 hours. Many persons believed that the soul remained near the body for three days after death. After that, a person was truly and surely dead. In this passage, we hear that it has been *four days!* For sure, there can be no hope now. But, enter Jesus! With him, even death, true death, will not stand! He has power over life and death. He is identified with the God of the living. Jesus experiences deep emotions, not just because his friend has died. Jesus grieves; He feels compassion; He is angry. He is angry that this cosmic evil, death, still ravages human life in this world. Who will deal with this old enemy? Who will defeat this ancient foe? Will God’s creation forever continue to be assailed by this monstrosity of evil? Death is not what God had intended for human life. The power of death has to be overcome, to show that all evil, all sin, needs to be eradicated from the world.

Martha does not lose hope when everyone else said it was hopeless. She senses that there is a power in Jesus that has not yet been seen among humans. She is possessed by an intuitive conviction that Jesus can make a difference. So, she confronts him: She bluntly tells him that he has come too late. “Smell the stench!” Why didn’t he come sooner? Underneath her harshness, she knows that Jesus is close to God and that God will hear his plea. She dares to defy logic; she appeals to Jesus.

“Take away the stone!” Jesus knows that the enemy, death, has to be confronted straight on. One cannot turn one’s face away from any threat. It has to be faced up to. It needs to be acknowledged. Call it by name. Do not flinch before death itself. Courage and a resolute spirit are needed. There is no pretending that death is not real. We cannot disguise it and dress it up like the embalmers do. We need to stare it down, armed with the power of God who is the Master of Life. We

are not stoics who stubbornly accept death as our fate or misfortune and just die bravely. We oppose death with the Spirit.

### **Ezekiel:**

The “Dry Bones” image in Ezekiel is one of the better-known passages from all the prophets in Jewish Scriptures. Ezekiel served as a prophet among God’s people from 593 to 563 BCE. During this time, Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians (587 BCE), and the nation went into the exile. The people were severely demoralized. They had lost all the signs of God’s presence and God’s favor from among them: the Temple was destroyed; the king was dead; their land was occupied by foreigners; they had been transported to an alien territory. The nation was as good as dead. Ezekiel offers a message of hope: God will make them live again as a nation. The image he offers consists of a field of bones, dry and without life, very much dead. Yet, the Lord who gives breath to all living things will restore them to life and to their land; they will be a living people again, a nation alive with God. They will be re-created by the same power with which they were created in the first place, the almighty “breath, wind, or spirit.”

### **Romans:**

Death still ravages the bodies of the faithful, even after Christ has overcome death in his resurrection. But the Spirit has been poured into their spirits, and now, they will endure; they will survive, even when death comes to the body. The resurrection of Christ has ushered in the “age to come,” which, in its completion, will have overcome death itself. This was the Good News which attracted so much attention in the early days of Christianity. That same message still goes to the very ends of the earth today and calls out to men and women and children of all conditions, of all states of life.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. “Roll away the stone!” Jesus invites us to uncover the evil, the sinfulness that lurks in the secret recesses of our lives. What means do you possess that will help you uncover your sins, that will reveal them to you? Do you dare bring out into the daylight of truth the “rot” and corruption that may have set in since you were baptized? Do you have the courage to ask a friend, a spiritual advisor, to help you uncover that which needs new life in you?

2. Discuss how Martha and Mary represent what we often feel and do when we have suffered a great loss: anger, blaming, reaching out, asking for help (perhaps in that order). Have you ever had those experiences after having lost someone you loved? Where did you turn for help? Is Jesus Christ one of the persons to whom you would turn if you had suffered much?

3. Discuss the role of Christian disciples in response to Jesus’ command: “Untie him and let him go!” Does it surprise you that Jesus asks us to cooperate with him in overcoming evil? What are some of the ways in which you can help overcome death? Do you see caregivers as providing such cooperation? Do you see parents in their role as givers of life as cooperating with God in overcoming death? Do you see educators in that role?

## SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Take an advance look at your own death. Do you have the eyes of Christian faith that will help you see your life with God? Take a look at the illnesses or the accidents that will rob you of life in this world. Spend some time with Jesus the Risen Lord in prayer. Share with a friend what your thoughts and feelings are in this regard

### PRAYER

**Lord Jesus Christ,  
Son of the Living God,  
have mercy on me, a sinner.**

## CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

"The obedience of Jesus has transformed the curse of death into a blessing."  
(The Catechism #1009)

Men and women have struggled with the mystery of death from the beginning of time. The great religions of the world have attempted to deal with death, to offer consolation at least when one is faced with this universal fact of life. Death appears to be so final. We try to postpone it with all our energies and all our ingenuity. Yet, death comes to everyone sooner or later.

In his dying and rising, Jesus Christ has broken through the barrier that had never before been breached. Jesus brought eternal life from the far reaches of the "other side" into the realm of everyday life. By faith in the Risen Lord, we have already broken through to life everlasting. In the depth of our living today, we carry the fruits of the risen life of Christ that will carry us beyond the limits of death to a new life with God.

In our dying, God calls us to himself through the power of the Holy Spirit which has even now transformed us into the likeness of the risen Christ. The Spirit gives us the divine energy (grace) to surrender ourselves to the care of God in obedience and love toward God our Father. Christ has modeled this obedience and love for the Father so that we could follow in his footsteps and walk with him to our own Calvary and break through to new life with him in God.

*"For your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended, and when this earthly dwelling turns to dust, an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven" (Roman Missal: Preface of Christian Death I).*

The Church calls out to the Lord in the face of death. Our pleadings arise from hurting souls as we face the death of our loved ones, as we contemplate the fact of our own dying. We are not alone as we come face to face with this ancient enemy. The community of disciples have themselves seen beyond the barriers of death and have glimpsed in Christ the life that is available to all who believe in his resurrection. The prayers of the Church assist us in life and in death. The body of Christ on earth utters these prayers for us. The assembly of the saints in heaven speak to God on our behalf for our reassurance. There is power in the prayer of the Church; it is the voice of Christ calling out to the heavenly Father from the tomb of Calvary. The pleading of Christ is always heard by the Father.

(See **The Catechism: # 1005-1014**)

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