

5th SUNDAY OF LENT, CYCLE A
Ezekiel 37: 12-14 + Romans 8: 8-11 + John 11: 1-44
Holy Spirit Catholic Church: March 29, 2020

Massive change came to this country this month.
For Catholics it came in a way never ever imagined—not being able
to come together to celebrate the Mass and receive the Holy Eucharist.

Many feel like strangers living in a strange land,
wondering when life will ever return to “normal” again.
Many feel like they have been entombed in their own homes,
and that the land they have lived in all their lives has changed into a place of exile.

To just such a people the Word of God comes through the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel:
“O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them.” (37:12)
To a people living in exile in Babylon, unable to worship at their temple in Jerusalem,
Ezekiel speaks, assuring them that what God promises he will do---
he will restore their lives and their land and their temple.
To a people living in America, sheltering in place for 2 weeks now,
who feel like they’ve been enclosed in a tomb, God speaks:
I will open your tombs and have you rise from them.

During this time of COVID-19, a time of paralyzing fear and overwhelming anxiety,
the Lord God promises to remove the stones from the tombs we live in,
calling us into the light of a new day, restoring us to our place of worship,
and granting us new life.

With the man born blind last Sunday, we could only be healed by Jesus
by admitting our blindness.
The gift given to those who recognize their blindness is that Jesus,
as the Light of the World, can then help them see.
So this Sunday we can only receive this new life by recognizing we are not fully alive,
by acknowledging we live in tombs, some of our own making.

As the One who is Resurrection and Life, Jesus keeps calling us to new life,
to a more abundant life, to a life lived more fully in the radiance of His saving love.
Many of us go through life thinking we are certainly alive, but this Gospel suggests
there is more to life than simply making it from one birthday to the next.

This Gospel helps us to recognize that we are dead people because of the deeds of our lives that are not signs of life.

These can be sinful attitudes which we are blind to that deaden our hearts and souls, so we cry out: "*Lord, I am blind. Help me to see.*"

Or during this time when life has slowed down for so many of us, we can see more clearly how being so busy, running hither and thither from one thing to the next, is a way of being entombed. Why?

Because we never take time to reflect upon what is essential and who is most important, and then act on those convictions.

So, we join Martha by professing our belief in Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life. Remember, "to believe" in John's Gospel is not an intellectual act, but a movement of the heart outwards toward the other.

The Greek word "*pistouen*" from which the English "*to believe*" comes from simply means "*to give one's heart to.*"

Martha and Mary and Lazarus, in their long-lasting friendship with Jesus, have given their heart to Jesus, and he to them, over and over and over again.

Today the Risen Jesus, the One who is Resurrection and Life, calls us with Lazarus to come out of the tombs we live.

He brings life out of death, joy from the well of sorrow, and fills us with hope when uncertainty and fear cloud our vision.

As St. Paul reminds us, the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us. By our baptism, the life-giving Holy Spirit dwells in us, each day empowering us to enter more fully into life with the Spirit-led One, Jesus the Christ.

This Spirit, which is stronger than death itself, also enlightens us to understand the deeper significance of the life we have been given in the Risen Christ.

Lazarus was resuscitated---he would live a little longer, but then he would eventually die. Risen Life, the life we now share in with Christ by the power of His Spirit, enables us to "*never die.*"

As we give our hearts and entire lives to Jesus, when we breathe our last breath on this earth, we pass over with Him who is Resurrection and Life to take our next breath of the fullness of life eternal.

The Spirit which transformed Jesus' human body into a glorified body,
a body in which he still lives and will live forever,
is the same Spirit dwelling within us by baptism.

These bodies, these earthen vessels, carry about in them a treasure untold,
the very life of God.

We have not yet entered into the fullness of that life,
but we are experiencing a taste of it now.

So do not fear the death of these mortal bodies,
for our hope rests in the Lord and our eternal home is with Him.

The Holy Spirit gifts us with fortitude to persevere in our trust in the Lord.
The Spirit of the Living God grants us the courage to keep entrusting our lives
and the lives of our loved ones into the hands of God.

We are invited to drink more deeply of this Living Water given us at baptism,
to immerse ourselves more fully into this Water of Life,
and to allow this River of Grace, who is the Spirit of life,
to carry us forward into a future full of hope.

Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi