

Sunday, March 26, 2023 – Fifth Sunday in Lent

First Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14

1-4 - The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD."

11-14 - Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophecy, and say to them, 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, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. 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, says the LORD."

Second Reading: Romans 8:6-11

11 – If the Spirit of him 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 his Spirit that dwells in you.

Gospel: John 11:1-45

1-6 - Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather, it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

The account of Mary's anointing Jesus with very expensive perfume is in the next chapter, John 12.

Mary had to do something to show her deep love for and express her great thanks to Jesus. When have you done something very extravagant to show your love for and express your thanks to Jesus?

By staying away two days longer Jesus was allowing the situation to become even worse so that the love and glory of God could be displayed even more powerfully.

Has there been a time in your life when Jesus might have delayed responding so that His power was needed even more and His love and His glory were made even more evident?

14-15, 17 - Jesus told his disciples plainly, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe." When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

It had reached the point where Jesus did not merely need to heal the sick, He needed to raise the dead. And He did not merely need to raise the dead, He needed to reverse the process of decomposition.

Also by this time there would be no question but that Lazarus was dead. He did not "come to" in the tomb.

18-27 - Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

Martha and Mary said exactly the same words: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

But Jesus' response was very different.

With Martha, Jesus gave a great theological promise: "I am the resurrection and the life." With Mary, Jesus was greatly disturbed and deeply moved and raised the dead. Why the difference? Also, Martha never really answered Jesus' question, "Do you believe this?"

28-29, 32-37 - Martha went back and called her sister Mary and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." When Mary heard it, she got up quickly and went to Jesus. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt 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 came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

What does it mean to you to know that when Jesus sees us weeping, He is greatly disturbed and deeply moved?

Why did Jesus weep? Because He saw His friends weeping? Because Lazarus had died?

Because He saw what sin and death had done to the human race? Because He knew what the response to Lazarus' resurrection would be?

38-41 - Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone.

41-44 - Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

What if, surrounded by tombs, Jesus had not been specific but instead had just said, "Come out!"

People can take away the stone and they can unbind people and let them go. But only God can raise the dead.

45 - Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.