

Go Forth...

A SERVICE OF U.S. CATHOLIC MISSION ASSOCIATION

MISSIONARY COMMENTARY

RISING WITH CHRIST



SUNDAY READINGS:

Ezekiel 37:12-14

Psalms 130:1-8

Romans 8:8-11

John 11:1-45

EMERGING FROM OUR TOMBS

Today, on the Fifth Sunday of Lent, we hear the astounding story of the resurrection of Lazarus. There is a marvelous amount of detail in this Gospel account from John the Evangelist. We learn so much about Jesus, his person, his mission, his compassionate heart.

Authentically Human. This narrative reveals Jesus' genuine humanity. It shows his deep friendship with Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary. His human emotions are revealed; the Gospel notes that he "became perturbed and deeply troubled." Then, "Jesus wept", which caused the Jews to remark, 'See how he loved him!'" Yes, Jesus wept! Indeed, Jesus is genuinely human, fully sharing our humanity!

Vatican II expressed the mystery of God-made-human in a beautiful, poetic way: "For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every person. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice, and loved with a human heart" (*Gaudium et Spes* 22). Though divine, Jesus was totally, fully, completely human.

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Solidarity in Suffering. The Gospel tells us that when Lazarus fell sick, his sisters, Martha and Mary, sent word to Jesus to inform him, ‘Master, the one you love is ill.’” Jesus goes to Bethany. He is met by Martha who says, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Troubled in spirit, Jesus approaches the tomb of Lazarus, who had been dead for four days. He asks that the stone covering the tomb be removed. Then Jesus calls out loudly, “Lazarus, come out!” Suggestion: Pause and allow your imagination to recreate this scene and reflect upon it!

Opening our Tombs. Pope Francis, reflecting on this Gospel passage, offers some profound insights. He notes: “Christ is not resigned to the tombs that we have built for ourselves with our choice for evil and death, with our errors, with our sins. He is not resigned to this! He invites us, almost orders us, to come out of the tomb in which our sins have buried us. He calls us insistently to come out of the darkness of that prison in which we are enclosed, content with a false, selfish and mediocre life.”

Francis continues: “It is an invitation to let ourselves be freed from the “bandages,” from the bandages of pride. For pride makes us slaves, slaves to ourselves, slaves to so many idols, so many things. Our resurrection begins here: when we decide to obey Jesus’ command by coming out into the light, into life.... Jesus’ act of raising Lazarus shows the extent to which the power of God’s grace can go.... There is no limit to the divine mercy offered to everyone!”

Imploring Mary’s Assistance. Pope Francis, concluding his “resurrection of Lazarus” reflection, turns to Mary. “May the Virgin Mary help us be compassionate like her son Jesus, who made our suffering his own.” Mary, assist us to become “a reflection of God’s love and tenderness.”

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NOTES ON THE SUNDAY READINGS:

First Reading – Ezekiel 37:12-14: In today's reading the prophet Ezekiel uses vivid images to teach a lesson. To the discouraged exiles in Babylon he has given the picture of dry bones coming together by God's power. Then, in this reading God announces that the restoration of the nation after the sufferings of the Exile will be like a people rising out of their graves.

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 130:1-8: This psalm selection is the traditional prayer for God's mercy—for both the living and the dead. As Christians, we truly believe that “with the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.” In addition, we acknowledge that if the Lord marked iniquities, no one could stand; however, we assert that with the Lord is kindness and plenteous redemption.

Second Reading – Romans 8:8-11: Here Paul continues to address the community in Rome, providing a lesson about the spiritual life. He asserts that those who live according to the flesh are spiritually dead. However, Christians have received God's Spirit; they belong to Christ. Indeed, God who raised Jesus from the dead will bring our mortal bodies to life through the Spirit dwelling in us.

Gospel – John 11:1-45: Our very familiar Gospel today from John narrates the story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead. It is a dramatic story of how Martha and Mary come to faith. The Gospel concludes by noting that many of the Jews who had come to comfort the two sisters saw what Jesus did; they also believed and put their faith in Jesus. We are also invited into deeper faith.

Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James H. Kroeger, who recently published three short, meditative books: *Living in Joyful Hope*, *Exploring Vatican II Treasures*, and *A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis* (www.faithalivebooks.com).

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