

O Death, Where is your victory? Where is your sting?

Lectio Divina of the Fifth Sunday A in Lent

Opening Prayer: Lord, you make all things new. You hold the keys over death, that by your might, Jesus was raised from the grave, paving the way for us to have new life with you. We confess our need for you. We ask that you renew our hearts, minds, and lives, for the days ahead. We pray for your refreshing over us. Keep your words of truth planted firm within us, help us to keep focused on what is pure and right, give us the power to be obedient to your word. Shine your light in us, through us, over us. Our very existence and our being flow from you. In You we live and move and have our being. May we be one with you as Jesus is one with you. You are the God who gives life to the dead. May the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead raise us from our fallen nature so that we may live our life fully. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

First Reading: A reading from the book of Ezekiel 37:12-14: Thus says the Lord GOD: O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them, and bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and have you rise from them, O my people! I will put my spirit in you that you may live, and I will settle you upon your land; thus you shall know that I am the LORD. I have promised, and I will do it, says the LORD (**The Word of the Lord/ Thanks be to God**)

Commentary: Prophet Ezekiel was carried to Babylon along with the Israelites as an exile and during the exilic time, the Lord inspired prophet Ezekiel to make a prophecy of a nation restored physically and spiritually that they would return to their land from their slavery in Babylon. Ezekiel felt that he was speaking to the dead as he preached to the exiles because they rarely responded to his message. The dry bones in the grave are the Jews in captivity. The scattered exiles of both Israel and Judah would be released from the graves of captivity and one day they will be regathered in their homeland with Messiah as their leader. Just as God brought life to the dead bones, He would bring life to the Israelites who were dead spiritually when they respond to the voice of God.

Responsorial 130: *With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.*

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD;
LORD, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to my voice in supplication.

R. *With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.*

If you, O LORD, mark iniquities,
LORD, who can stand?
But with you is forgiveness,
that you may be revered.

R. *With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.*

I trust in the LORD;
my soul trusts in his word.
More than sentinels wait for the dawn,
let Israel wait for the LORD.

R. With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.

For with the LORD is kindness
and with him is plenteous redemption;
And he will redeem Israel
from all their iniquities.

R. With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.

Second Reading: A reading from the letter of St. Paul to the Romans 8:8-11

Brothers and sisters: Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit dwelling in you. **(The Word of the Lord/ Thanks be to God)**

Commentary: A Christian is the one who has the Spirit of God living in him/her. If one sincerely trusts Christ for his salvation and acknowledges him as Lord, then the Holy Spirit is in his life. When the Holy Spirit is working in one's life, then he will believe that Jesus Christ is God's Son who is the giver of eternal life. The Holy Spirit is God's promise of eternal life for those who believe in him.

Gospel Reading: A reading from the holy gospel according to St. John 11:1-45

Now a man was ill, Lazarus from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who had anointed the Lord with perfumed oil and dried his feet with her hair; it was her brother Lazarus who was ill. So the sisters sent word to him saying, "Master, the one you love is ill." When Jesus heard this he said, "This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place where he was. Then after this he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just trying to stone you, and you want to go back there?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in a day? If one walks during the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks at night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." He said this, and then told them, "Our friend Lazarus is asleep, but I am going to awaken him." So the disciples said to him, "Master, if he is asleep, he will be saved." But Jesus was talking about his death, while they thought that he meant ordinary sleep. So then Jesus said to them clearly, "Lazarus has died. And I am glad for you that I was not there, that you may believe. Let us go to him." So Thomas, called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go to die with him."

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, only about two miles away. And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise." Martha said to him, "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus told her,

"I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to

him, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world." When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary secretly, saying, "The teacher is here and is asking for you." As soon as she heard this, she rose quickly and went to him. For Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still where Martha had met him. So when the Jews who were with her in the house comforting her saw Mary get up quickly and go out, they followed her, presuming that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell 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 had come with her weeping, he became perturbed and deeply troubled, and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Sir, come and see." And Jesus wept. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him." But some of them said, "Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?"

So Jesus, perturbed again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay across it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him, "Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus raised his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me." And when he had said this, He cried out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, "Untie him and let him go." Now many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he had done began to believe in him (**The Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ/ Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ**).

Meditation: Among all the evils that humans encounter, the most painful evil is the evil of death because other evils at least allow us to live with some pains whereas death completely snatches our life. It takes months and years to reconcile with the reality of death. It is a painful reality. And it is a mystery which we are not able to comprehend completely although the scriptures tell us very clearly. We are afraid of death. Woody Allen, the famous actor and comedian once said, "***I am not afraid of dying. I just don't want to be there when it happens***". But today's liturgy of the word of God is all about death. Grave, Tears, complaints and ultimately joy.

Most of the gospel passages speak about the divinity of Jesus Christ. Although he was God himself, he never forgot to reveal his human quality on few occasions with lot of emotions and feelings. And today's gospel is a beautiful piece of Jesus' humanity, feelings and emotions. In his public life, Jesus went and participated in the wedding at Cana in Galilee where he performed his first miracle of changing water into wine and making everyone happy in the wedding, especially the family. He went as a family with Blessed Mother and his disciples. He was also deeply sensitive to the reality of death. Jesus took the dead girl by the hand and said to her ***Talitha Qum***, "little girl, I say to you, get up". Today's episode of the raising of Lazarus is another beautiful piece and a wonderful manifestation of Jesus' humanity.

Jesus was a family friend of Lazarus and Martha and Mary. They were living in Bethany, just two miles away from Jerusalem. According to the Biblical scholars, this house of Martha and Mary was a guest house. He felt at home. Whenever he went to Jerusalem, he stopped by this house and he he was warmly welcomed by this family. They treated him well by taking good care of Jesus (Martha) and listening to what he has to say and wanting to be close to him (Mary). Their love for each other was very

mutual and the gospel says that he loved them. He was part of this beautiful family. When a tragedy happened to this family, it affected him also and his sadness is vividly pictured by the evangelist that he became perturbed and deeply troubled and he wept. Perturbing deeply, troubling inside and weeping openly are clear manifestations of his deep emotions. That shows how sincere his love was for the family.

We are human beings and we deal with human beings everywhere; at home, at work. Most of the times we are very happy to participate in the joyous occasions of our families and friends like birthdays and wedding days. We should also learn to be part of sad events like sickness and death because shared joy is a double joy; shared sorrow is a half sorrow. We read in Ecclesiastes 7:2 ***“It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting, For that is the end of every mortal, and the living should take it to heart”***. It is also said very sadly that ***‘we come without knowing, live without loving and die without mourning’***. We are human beings which means we have to show our empathy to the suffering humanity. There is a difference between human beings and being human. In our age of science and technology, we helplessly see human beings becoming more and more mechanical than personal without emotional connections. It is easy to manifest our emotions and connections with our own blood family members but we must try to show them to all human beings because we belong to each other as human being. Dalai Lama says, ***“Love and Compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive”***. At work, we are expected to be professional but in our real life, we are expected to be more personal by being sensitive to the emotions and feelings of the people with whom we are dealing. There are hundreds of people dying everyday due to sickness, accidents, natural calamities, war, suicides and other various forms of death. In the face of these deaths, what is our response? Is it just a news for us or are we somehow connected to this reality?

After manifesting humanity very deeply, Jesus goes back to manifest his divinity by raising his friend dead Lazarus from his death. He reveals thus the glory of God being revealed in him. Jesus had the power to raise people from death. What he did to Lazarus, he will do for us and everyone who believe in him because he is the resurrection and life. A week after raising Lazarus, Jesus died on the cross and after three days he rose. This is all about his life and our life. We had our entrance to this life and we will one day have our exit, leaving space for others. But as believers of Jesus, we will be living for ever and ever. Until then, let us learn to be close to one another especially the grieving families. Let us learn to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Let us not worry about unavoidable death because for us, death is an opening to a new life, guaranteed by Jesus by his death and resurrection. Like Jesus, let us strengthen our brothers and sisters so that they may believe in Jesus and live for ever and ever. Amen.

Concluding Prayer: Risen Lord, In this world, we will have tribulation, and it's not always easy to be of good cheer. But our hearts can take courage as we remember the resurrection, the very present hope that not only have you been raised from the dead, but you are even now resurrecting bodies and hearts. Our believing loved ones who have died before us are now with you in heaven praying with us. You are making our hearts new. You are making your heavens and earth new. One day, all of your people will gather together in the fully restored new heavens and new earth. In that day, all of our tears will be wiped away, and there will be no more cause for mourning. Until that day comes, bring us the comfort and hope only you can give. Help us to believe what we have heard and to answer with Mary, “I believe that You are the Messiah, the Son of God.” May you show us your glory in putting death to death, in bringing life to the dark and cold places of our lives and our world. Amen.