

March 18, 2018

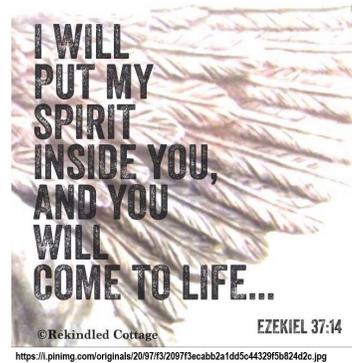
Fifth Sunday in Lent - "A" Cycle

Readings can be obtained from: <http://usccb.org/bible/readings/031818-year-a.cfm>

Cyril of Jerusalem: <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/saint-cyril-of-jerusalem/>

Readings: Ezekiel 37: 12-14; Psalm 130: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8; Romans 8: 8-11; John 11: 1-45

From GOD's promise of restoring life in Ezekiel, through Saint Paul's reminder that our mortal bodies will be brought to life, to Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead, the theme of new life reverberates loudly. GOD wants us to have life – the fullness of life – eternal life – life from, with, and of GOD.



Ezekiel reminds the people who are in exile that even though it seems like they have no life, GOD promises to breathe the divine life back into them and raise them to new life. Even those who are dead and buried are being called from the grave to life with GOD.

Psalm 130 promises fullness of redemption to those who trust in the LORD. With the LORD there is life. Without the LORD there is only death, and death to all relationships.

St. Paul reminds us that we are called not to live in the flesh – the sinful ways of the world – but to live in the Spirit, the Spirit Who raised Jesus from the dead and Who will also raise our mortal bodies to eternal life. We need to die to our life of sin and be raised to the new life and full relationship with GOD, in and through Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Our Gospel passage today is the story of the raising of Lazarus. As typical of John, there is much for us to ponder. Jesus, from the beginning of the passage, realizes that Lazarus will be raised from the dead for the purpose of glorifying GOD. Jesus is willing to risk being arrested in order to bring life to one whom He loves. Jesus speaks of

death as slumber from which Lazarus must be awoken. Jesus shows true compassion for (“suffering with”) Mary and Martha in their time of grief.

Martha, although upset that Jesus did not come sooner, professes her belief in “the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus proclaims that He is the Resurrection and the Life, and that those who believe in Him will have life even if they are dead. Martha declares her faith in Jesus as the Son of GOD. Mary also expresses her displeasure (anger?) that Jesus did not arrive in time to prevent Lazarus' death.

Jesus is moved to tears as He sees how Mary, Martha, and their friends are grieving at the death of Lazarus. When Jesus asks that the stone be removed from the entrance to the tomb, practical Martha warns Jesus about the stench from a body which has been decomposing for four days. Jesus calls Lazarus forth and commands those nearby to unbind Lazarus and permit him to be free.

This passage lends itself to great reflections which could fill the pages of a book. One such reflection could focus on Jesus' love for Lazarus and his sisters. Jesus has already developed a close relationship with the three members of this family. He has spent time with them. They have tended to His needs and He has blessed them with many hours of sharing the GOoD News. They have listened attentively to His message.

Jesus uses the occasion of Lazarus' deadly sickness to show how much His *Abba*-Father and Himself love not only Lazarus, but Mary and Martha – and, in turn, each one of us. Jesus knows it is part of His *Abba*'s plan to give life, full life, resurrected life to those who believe in Him. This new and restored life is all part of

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<http://www.servicioskoinonia.org/cerezo/dibujosA/18CuaresmaA5.jpg>

the ever deepening covenant relationship which the Lord Jesus wants with the beloved of GOD – Lazarus, Martha, and Mary – and us. It is also a foreshadowing of the new life Jesus would bring through His own resurrection from the dead.

One of the things that strikes me is that I am no less loved by Jesus than Lazarus, Martha, and Mary are loved by Him. Jesus wants as close a relationship with me as He has with the three siblings of today's Gospel. And just as He challenges Mary and Martha to believe in Him Who is the Resurrection and the Life, He also asks me to profess my faith in Him. Jesus is waiting for me to say the words which Martha spoke: "Yes, Lord, I have come to believe that You are the Messiah, the Son of GOD – He Who is to come into the world."

I am also reminded that Jesus wants me to have such a relationship with Him that I can express my disappointment with GOD when things do not go as I plan – as long as I ultimately profess my faith in Jesus, trusting that with GOD there is mercy and fullness of redemption (responsorial). I also have come to the realization that Jesus will be with me during my times of grief and sorrow, compassionately weeping with me as I experience losses in my life. I will not be alone or without help, for Jesus will be there to comfort me as He comforts and weeps with Martha and Mary in today's Gospel.

I also am touched thinking about the fact that Jesus wants to call me forth from my apparently deadly attitude and invite me to the fullness of life, not just at the resurrection on the last day, but right now as I journey along my way to GOD (first reading). I have the thought that just as Jesus has other people involved in cutting the bonds that hold Lazarus, so that Lazarus can be free; so also, Jesus places people in my life to help me when I am held bound by restricting issues which prevent me from being free, and similarly I am to help others who are bound with various ties that prevent them from full life now and in the future.

The powerful message that rings out from the readings today is simply that Jesus loves me no less than He loves Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Jesus wants me to be in as close a relationship as He has with the three members of the household of Bethany. Jesus wants to share the fullness of life with me – right now, not just at the end of my life. All I need to do is to put my trust in the Lord Jesus and give praise and glory to His *Abba* – my *Abba*. What a powerful thought. I am humbled and feel loved. I want to respond by living not in my sinful way (the way of the flesh) but in the Spirit (second reading). Praise be GOD for sending Jesus to proclaim this message to me – and to you.

The personal question/action for today: What is my attitude when I experience grief in my life? Do I become angry with GOD so much so that I turn away from the Lord Jesus and His *Abba*? Do I express my feelings and also profess my faith that GOD loves me and will give me a restored life? How is my relationship with GOD right now? Do I trust GOD and profess my belief in GOD even though I don't see the light of new life? How can I comfort others who are experiencing pain, dying, and/or grief? How can I assure them of the eternal life that GOD wants them to have?

Blessed are You, LORD GOD, ever alive and always living. Through Your GOoDness, You have desired that we humans share in Your life. From the first moments of creation, You have breathed Your Spirit into the clay of the earth, and have enlivened flesh with Your Spirit. Even when sin damaged our relationship with You, You did not turn Your back on us, even though we had turned our back on You. You promised to send One Who would restore life to our dying flesh. You kept Your promise in the sending of Your Son, Jesus. He lived a life which proclaims Your desire that we have life – life to the fullest. He was willing to walk with us, sharing our sorrows and pains, even dying Himself as a sign of Your wanting us to have life. His raising of Lazarus and His own resurrection renew Your covenant promise, and our hope, of the eternal life and everlasting relationship with You. May we, together with Jesus Your Son, give You glory and praise as we experience the fullness of life You offer us. As always we make this prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus, Your Son, the Resurrection and the Life, Who is living and reigning with You and the Holy Spirit, our one and only GOD, for ever and ever. Amen.

Song of the Day: *Yes, Jesus Loves Me* - Whitney Houston's last performance: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mx9Lzw03lyE>
When Love Sees You by Mac Powell: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4DK7arkztw>
That You May Have Life: Mary, Martha and Lazarus: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYQkCJZYLMw>

Video of the Day: *Cyril of Jerusalem:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-S3zJFoM5wo>

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