

## Fifth Sunday of Lent (For use with RCIA)

### Reading 1

[Ez 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.

### Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8](#)

**R. (7) 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.**

### Reading II

[Rom 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.

## Gospel

[Jn 11:1-45](#) or [11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-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.

**or**

The sisters of Lazarus sent word to Jesus, 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."

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus  
had already been in the tomb for four days.  
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,  
"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."

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.

Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States, second typical edition, Copyright © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine; Psalm refrain © 1968, 1981, 1997, International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc. All rights reserved. Neither this work nor any part of it may be reproduced, distributed, performed or displayed in any medium, including electronic or digital, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

## HOMILY

**Dear brothers and sisters,**

A child, it is believed has once said *“Men and women are the words God uses to write his story”!* Many of you who are parents and have raised children have experienced how sometimes children say things of such astonishing truth and you wonder how? But this should not come as a surprise if you have been attentive to the scriptures; the book of wisdom says that *“it is through the mouth of children and foolish that truth comes out”*. And remember this story of Suzanna, that is to be read tomorrow in the liturgy of the mass, a story in which a young lady was unjustly condemned to death by vicious elders and was being brought to the place where she was to be stoned while the Spirit of the Lord came upon a young boy called Daniel who said to the crowd *“I am innocent of this woman’s blood”* and in the process, he was able to convict these rotten judges of false evidence and the life of an innocent woman was spared. Jesus himself in Gospel usually prays to his father in these words *“I bless you Father, because you have hidden these things to the wise and the intelligent and revealed them to mere children...”* The quotation of this child aforementioned sounded so true that it inspired the great Belgian Dominican theologian Edward Schillebeeckx the title of one of his last books: ***“Church: The Human Story of God”***.

The gospel on the raising of Lazarus from the dead that we have just heard is one of these stories in which God’s reveals himself to human kind. This story about Lazarus being raised is actually God’s own story, carefully crafted in the meditation of the apostle John to tell us how God’s passage in human history has open new life and raised fallen human nature to God’s own glory.

When Jesus heard that his friend Lazarus was ill, he said to his disciples: *“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.”* In other words Lazarus illness will be the golden opportunity to reveal God’s power over evil and death. The rising of Lazarus from the dead will be the greatest sign (John is careful to call Jesus miracles signs) for his disciples and for the people around them namely the Jews, of the manifestation of God’s sovereignty over his creation. This sign is already in John’s understanding the benefit of the Jesus ‘s death on the cross, death by which he reveals God’s glory and is glorified by the same token. Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is adding to his opponents’ anger because of this miracle lots of people may come to believe in him.

But nothing could stop the realization of this mission that he received from the father. When his disciples pointed out that going back to Judea could mean risking his life he answered in a kind of riddle that nothing could stop the realization of the God’s plan.

John was careful to mentioned that when Jesus heard of his friend’s illness he did not go immediately he continued his ministry as if there was no emergency, and actually when he arrived in Bethany Lazarus has been dead for four days, the reason for this detail is that there was a belief in the time of Jesus that a remnant of life-force or spirit might yet remain near the body of a deceased person for three days. The evangelist’s insistence on Lazarus’ body laid in the tomb for four days meant that Lazarus was truly dead and what was revealed through Jesus’ work is unmistakably a miracle, worthy of belief.

It is always instructive to notice how Jesus meets people in the gospels, Martha, as usual, was first to meet Jesus and with heavy feelings, sorrow and but still faith, said to him *“Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know whatever you ask of God, God will give you”* and Jesus as if to lead her in deep water probed her faith *“Your brother will rise”* and Martha in a kind of resentment but still in faith said *“I know he will rise on, in the resurrection on the last day”*. And Jesus said: *“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?”* In other words Jesus is saying to Martha *“it is not a question of tomorrow, on the last day, the resurrection and the life it is me”* As John has it in a different part of his Gospel, Jesus said : *“My Father has entrusted me the world, salvation and life come through me and it is now that it is being fulfilled” He or she who believes in me will die no more, he or she has already passed thru the judgment because I have come to redeem the world and whoever believes in me is already saved.*

Martha answered *“Yes Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the One who is coming into the world.”* Comforted at this but surely still wondering deep down in her soul the all import of these words, Martha went back to her sister Mary and told her, *“the teacher is here and is asking for you”*...and Mary in her turn said to Jesus *“Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”* Here the evangelist showed us how Jesus, a human being made of blood and flesh responded to these two sisters in pain and sorrow he was deeply moved and showed compassion and communion, Lazarus was his friend, he shed tears and asked *“Where have you laid him”?* Arrived at the tomb he said: *“Take away the stone”*; Martha demonstrated once again that she was still half-way on the road to complete faith: *“Lord, **she said**, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days”*, *“Yes I know, must have answered Jesus “Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God”?* And Jesus prayed his Father and showed to his doubting disciples and his contemptuous fellow countrymen that were around that he is the one sent to redeem them, he shares in the power of God, he shares in the prerogatives of the divine and is able to give life to what is dead; he revealed his sovereignty over his creation; he showed that he has come from the father to fulfill his will, that is, to bring all of God’s dispersed children home.

Lazarus rising from the dead is an anticipation and a foretelling of Jesus’ own resurrection by which he frees all human beings from the power of sin and death. The apostle Thomas in a lightening of faith was right to encourage his fellow disciples in saying, *“Yes, let us go to Jerusalem and die with him”!* By dying to sin in the water of baptism we become new creatures in Christ and have a share in his new life of resurrection. This is the promise that Christ makes to those who through faith accept his message and gift of grace. This will be the share of all our brothers and sisters who on the day of Easter will receive the sacrament of baptism.

The resurrected life is not a forlorn hope or promise; as St Paul said: *“**for those who believe in Christ the new life has already begun**”* and the Holy Spirit dwelling in us is the mark of our belonging to the blessed ones of God. God is always faithful to his promises and today’s liturgy shows how God in his plan of salvation, begun with the people of Israel, has always fulfilled his promises to his people. In the first reading, we see that the people of God in exile are promised by the prophet Ezekiel that the Lord will bring them out of their graves, reestablishing them in the promised land; this is accomplished through the Spirit that will be given to the people,

similar to God's original act of creation when the Spirit of the Lord was breathed over the waters, turning chaos into ordered life.

Today's gospel convinces us that God is ever-present to our human situations, like those of Marie, Martha and Lazarus Jesus shares in our lives and is always troubled with what troubles us. Do we accept like Jesus friends' to do the act of faith, to open our hearts and believe in the power of the Son of Man? Like Lazarus, Jesus wants to free us from our sins and call us out of our entrenched caves of self-centeredness and to make us free; shall we give him a chance? The resurrected life is also a new life in the Spirit who leads us, as St Paul says, to look to the things of on high; Is the Spirit we have received in baptism living in us and helping us to make the necessary discernment between what is passing and what is lasting? This time of lent given to us is the perfect occasion to re-assess our Christian commitments and our life in the Spirit. May he guide us to a renewed trust in Christ and to a better openness to our brothers and sisters.

*Rev. Anatole Tiendrebeogo*