



5th Sunday of Lent



Date: Sunday, March 26, 2023 | **Season:** Lent | **Year:** A

First Reading: Ezekiel 37:12–14

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 130:1–8 | **Response:** Psalm 130:7

Second Reading: Romans 8:8–11

Gospel Acclamation: John 11:25a–26

Gospel Reading: John 11:1–45

Preached at: the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Braamfontein in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Today's readings talk about three things. We hear talk of prophecy in the first reading, a righteous spirit in the second reading, and death and resurrection in the Gospel, or in Lazarus' case, resuscitation, from the dead. In a nutshell, we are witnesses to the promise of new life in the world.

The raising of Lazarus takes place, we're told, in Bethany. The modern-day name of Bethany is beautiful by the way: in Arabic it is "El Azariah," the Town of Lazarus. But this Gospel text this morning is the third text from John that has traditionally been used during the Lenten period to prepare catechumens for Baptism. Baptism we remember is the sacrament wherein we are given new life. In this, the greatest of Jesus' signs, the lessons for baptism are brought to a climax. We find ourselves, perhaps, in the tomb of Lazarus, waiting for the Lord. But we are promised today that the dead man Lazarus will come out of the tomb. Jesus says: "I came so that they might have life and have life abundantly". Let us remember that this is Jesus' desire for all of us this Lent: that we will have life and have it abundantly. This abundant life is also what he invites Martha to: he is the resurrection and the life. In our second reading Paul, in his letter to the Romans, develops what this means for us who believe in Jesus and have been baptized in Christ's name. We are told that by virtue of the Spirit of Christ that we received at our Baptism, we are caught up in his resurrection and can therefore be sure that some day even our mortal bodies will share his life.

How can we find life at the moment? What are the life-giving activities that we can do as families and friends? Can we be patient with each other? Can we call and reach out to those who are alone and let them know that they are remem-

bered. We can all help each other experience the gift of life by small actions of prayer and charity to communicate to each other.

Finally, in our first reading we hear from the prophecy of Ezekiel, where resurrection functions as a sign that points to the power of God. The power of God to bring the exiles in Babylon back to the land of Israel.

Putting this altogether, I believe that we are reminded that life and resurrection are not private matters; the new life God gives through the Spirit is not just for us to enjoy, but it brings communities together, as well as individuals, and it reintroduces life into them. We must endeavour to be righteous and believe Jesus' words, so that we might have life and live it to the full, and share that with others.

At this time, the prayerful support of individuals and communities are needed more than ever as we learn to be Church in a new way. And God's power is seen in how He can still touch each of us, right where we are.

So those three points that I think are made in the readings today have to do with prophesy, righteousness, and death and resurrection. And we could do well to ask ourselves who are the prophets in our lives that we listen to? Who are the righteous women and men who stand up for the poor and the weak? And what is our faith and attitude towards death? Do we believe in the resurrection and the new life that Jesus tells us God is promising and preparing for us.

But there's another interesting point I'd like to highlight. After calling Lazarus to come out – Jesus does not direct his words to Lazarus as one might expect, but rather to the onlookers, the crowd. Did you notice that? Instead of greeting Lazarus, he prefers to address the crowd, and perhaps we can imagine Jesus talking to us to when he tells them, and us: “Unbind him, and let him go.”

Christians are very good, I find, at binding others. At pointing out the faults of others, and holding certain groups of people to a higher standard than they themselves are willing to live in their own life. Jesus had a word for those people too – hypocrites and broods of vipers etc.

But today Jesus is asking us to unbind him, and ‘let him go’. Who are the groups of people in our Society that we bind? Who are the ones we forbid to come out? They would be the ones who are outcast. Perhaps it is those who are remarried?

Or LGBT? Or who are somehow ‘other’? Remember, as Pope Francis often reminds us, we are called to work for justice and the human rights of all persons. We are called to unbind everyone from the injustice and discrimination that binds so many people in our Society.

But perhaps we do not even have to go that far. Perhaps we might even find ourselves bound in some way here this morning? Perhaps there are people here who find themselves wrapped in the clothes of death, choking to breathe the air of new life?

If that’s the case, please allow me to invite you this morning to reflect on what bad habits, sinful attitudes or behaviours we want to “let die” within ourselves. Perhaps it’s a resentment, a grudge, an unhealthy way of living. We can offer all of that back to God and ask him to let it die within us. We can, like Lazarus, allow ourselves to be raised to new life by ‘dying’ and giving these over to God this Lent.

So what would you like to “let die” in your life? Jesus asks you to “die to self” only to give you life in the full. Just like he did for Lazarus. So come out, and allow yourself to be unbound, allow yourself to be free and who you were created to be – to live that fullest life possible, the life that is God’s deepest desire for you to truly live and be fully alive!

Amen.

Source: <https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2023-03mar-26-ya-lt-05/>

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