

5th Sunday of Lent A

First Reading Ezekiel 37:12-14

The Lord says this: I am now going to open your graves; I mean to raise you from your graves, my people, and lead you back to the soil of Israel. And you will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and raise you from your graves, my people. And I shall put my spirit in you, and you will live, and I shall resettle you on your own soil; and you will know that I, the Lord, have said and done this – it is the Lord God who speaks.

Second Reading Romans 8:8-11

People who are interested only in unspiritual things can never be pleasing to God. Your interests, however, are not in the unspiritual, but in the spiritual, since the Spirit of God has made his home in you. In fact, unless you possessed the Spirit of Christ you would not belong to him.

Though your body may be dead it is because of sin, but if Christ is in you then your spirit is life itself because you have been justified; and if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, then he who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your own mortal bodies through his Spirit living in you.

Gospel John 11:3-7.17-27.33-45

The sisters, Martha and Mary, sent this message to Jesus, "Lord, the man you love is ill."

On receiving the message, Jesus said, "This sickness will end not in death but in God's glory, and through it the Son of God will be glorified." Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when he heard that Lazarus was ill he stayed where he was for two more days before saying to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea." On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to sympathise with them over their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus had come she went to meet him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that, even now, whatever you ask of God, he will grant you." "Your brother," said Jesus to her "will rise again." Martha said, "I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said: "I am the resurrection. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she said, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world." Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart, "Where have you put him?" They said, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept; and the Jews said, "See how much he loved him!" But there were some who remarked, "He opened the eyes of the blind man, could he not have prevented this man's death?" Still sighing, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, "Take the stone away."

Martha said to him, "Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day." Jesus replied, "Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said: "Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer. I know indeed that you always hear me, but I speak for the sake of all these who stand round me, so that they may believe it was you who sent me." When he had said this, he cried in a loud voice, "Lazarus, here! Come out!" The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with bands of stuff and a cloth round his face. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, let him go free." Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what he did believed in him.

Meditation

The raising of Lazarus is the final sign, the final great miracle, in the Gospel of John. Paradoxically, even as the death of Lazarus works for the glory of God, his restoration to life leads to the death of Jesus. The battle lines are drawn for these final weeks of Lent. Death seems to conquer, but the dying itself holds the seed of life. At the time of the Babylonian exile the people Israel seemed to be dead. The temple had been destroyed, the land laid waste, and the leaders of the people taken into captivity. But Ezekiel proclaims that the Lord will restore his people. Just as the Lord breathed the breath of life into the moulded clay and Adam became a living being, so now the Lord sends his spirit into the dry bones of Israel that it may live. The Lord restores his people to life. Jesus, in the

power of God, restores Lazarus to life. But these events are only a figure of the gift of life which comes through the death and resurrection of Jesus. In him we have been freed from the law of sin and death. Baptized into his death, we believe that we will live with his life through the Spirit of God dwelling in us. "We are God's children now, what we shall later be has not yet come to light. We know that when it comes to light we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2)