

5th SUNDAY OF LENT
 SUNDAY LITURGY OF THE WORD
 A PRAYER RESOURCE DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC
 REVEREND GLENN D. LeCOMPTE, S. T. L.

Preparation: you will need someone to be a leader. You may ask others to do the readings. The reader of the petitions of the Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful) may also be a different person. If you don't have this many people, adapt as needed. Please observe social distancing.

Introductory Rites

Opening Song (optional)

Suggestions (the weblinks in parentheses are youtube sound files):

"Be Not Afraid" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQr4udSiEew>)

"Lord, Let Me Walk" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fE1iky2gU>)

"I Am the Bread of Life" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mx-YLvUzw>)

Sign of the Cross and Greeting

(All make the sign of the cross)

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Others: Amen.

Leader: The Lord be with you.

Others: And with your spirit.

Leader: In today's Gospel Reading, a messenger from Martha and Mary will inform Jesus that his friend Lazarus is sick. His response is, "This sickness is not to end in death." Jesus encourages us to depend on our faith in him to carry us through this difficult time.

Penitential Act

Leader: My brothers and sisters, let us turn with confidence to the Lord and ask his forgiveness for all our sins.

(Pause briefly for silent reflection)

Leader says:

Lord Jesus, you healed the sick, Lord have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you forgave sinners, Christ have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you give us yourself to heal us
and bring us strength, Lord, have mercy.

May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins,
and bring us to everlasting life.

Others reply:

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Amen.

Prayer

Leader: Let us pray.

By your help, we beseech you, Lord our God,
 may we walk eagerly in that same charity with which, out of love for the world,
 your Son handed himself over to death.
 Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
 who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, for ever and ever.

Others: Amen.

Liturgy of the WordFirst Reading

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel

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.

All: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

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.

Second Reading

A reading from the letter of St. Paul to the Romans

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.

All: Thanks be to God.

Gospel Reading

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to John

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 the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.



Reflections on the Readings

First Reading (Ezekiel 37:12-14). Ezekiel 37:1-14 recounts the prophet Ezekiel's experience of a divine vision, followed by an explanation of the vision. Ezekiel sees a mass of human bones strewn across the desert ground and severely bleached and dried by the sun. The vision represents an intense image of death. God tells Ezekiel to summon the winds to breathe life into these dry bones. He does so and witnesses a "resurrection" of the bones into, not only living beings, but "a vast army" (37:10). In verse 11 God interprets the vision; it is a response to Israel's lament, "Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost and we are cut off." Israel is referring to its dismal experience in exile in Babylon. But now God is freeing them from exile and restoring them to life as they return to their homeland and reestablish their life, culture and worship.

Perhaps our experience of having to be shut-in due to the coronavirus pandemic has made us feel like the Israelites in exile, "cut off" from people and activities we love. We may feel as though our life is like the dry bones. But the reading gives us courage to hope for restoration.

Second Reading (Romans 8:8-11). Paul's instruction on "life in the Spirit" in Romans 8 can be understood on several levels. First, when he speaks about "The Flesh," he is speaking about our state before receiving the grace of the Spirit, a state that leads us only to death, not merely physical, but, even worse, eternal death. Paul's later reminder that we are not "indebted" to the Flesh to live according to it (Romans 8:12) indicates that we must be wary of living as if we were not redeemed. Being "in the Spirit" means the state of having received new life in Christ through the gift of the Spirit. We encounter the life-giving Spirit by means of our union with Christ through faith. The gift of the Spirit makes us new people here and now, and no longer necessarily subjected to life in the Flesh. Life in the Spirit leads to eternal life. Paul goes on to say that if the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells within us, that same spirit will give "life" to our mortal bodies (8:11). This assertion can be understood in two senses. We anticipate that, like Jesus Christ, who was the first to rise, "we shall also be united with him in [a bodily] resurrection" (see Romans 6:5). Additionally, our "resurrection" means here and now that we have been made into new people who can live obediently and faithfully in relationship to God (see Romans 6:4).

Even in the midst of this pandemic, it is important to remember that the Spirit of God dwells within us. The life-giving Spirit overcomes death in us. In the Bible death can have a range of meaning from misfortune to tragedy to physical death to spiritual death. Illness, especially when it is severe, is a form of "death" in the sense that it robs our quality of life. But it is important to remember that the Spirit who dwells within us is there to give us life.

Gospel Reading (John 11:1-45). The episode of Jesus' resuscitation of Lazarus follows a tense scene at the end of John, chapter 10. The "Jews" (those Jews who are opposed to Jesus) want to stone him for blasphemy because he declared that he and the Father are one (10:30-33). Jesus counters that if they will not believe on account of his words, they should believe because he does the Father's "works" (10:37-38). In chapter 11, he performs one of his Father's works. Jesus resuscitates Lazarus from death, which is one of several "signs" Jesus performs in John's Gospel. Jesus' signs point to a truth about him. In this case, that truth is that God gives resurrection and life to those who believe in Jesus. Those who believe here and now that Jesus is the source of resurrection and life begin to experience a life that endures into eternity. The point is that true life is a life lived with faith in Jesus. Earlier in the episode, when a messenger came from Martha and Mary to tell Jesus of his friend Lazarus' severe illness, he purposely delays his departure, but declares "This illness is not to end in death."

Certainly, contracting the coronavirus is a matter of concern for everyone. In such a case people may experience distress, anxiety and sadness, and perhaps begin to question their faith. Some have lost their lives. But to be truly alive is to be alive with faith in Jesus Christ. It is this faith that can give us strength in the midst of this difficult time.

Reflection Questions

As you wish, you may either discuss the following questions with one another or reflect upon them silently.

1. Has social distancing made you feel “cut off” as the Israelites in exile felt? If it has been difficult, what in the readings gives you a sense of hope?
2. In the face of the coronavirus pandemic, what does it mean to be “truly alive”? If the pandemic has robbed you of a quality of life, how can faith that Jesus is the source of resurrection and life help you to find joy and peace in these difficult times?

Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful)

Leader: The composer of the Responsorial Psalm today cries out from the depths and asks the Lord to be attentive to his voice in supplication; so do we.

Reader: Please respond, “Lord, hear our prayer.”

For our brothers and sisters around the world who are suffering from the coronavirus pandemic, may they find healing and comfort, we pray to the Lord.

That the current pandemic may not distract us from our Lenten journey of conversion, we pray to the Lord.

For those who feel alone and depressed because of isolation at this time, that their brothers and sisters may be moved to help relieve their sadness by reaching out to them, we pray to the Lord.

For those who have died as a result of this pandemic, that faith in Jesus Christ as the resurrection and life may lead them into eternal life, we pray to the Lord.

(The participants may add intentions.)

Leader: Let us conclude our petitions to the Lord by offering the prayer that best expresses to God what we truly need.

All: Our Father, who art in heaven,
 hallowed be thy name.
 Thy kingdom come,
 Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Prayer for Spiritual Communion

Leader: During this time when we are not able to receive Christ in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist due to the current restriction on gatherings in order to promote the common good, we can be spiritually in communion with Christ. He promised to be with us until the end of the age, and we acknowledge that

he is with us today. Let us then pray the following Act of Spiritual Communion:

All: My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.
I love you above all things and I desire to receive you in my soul.
Since I cannot at this moment receive you sacramentally,
Come at least spiritually into my heart.
I embrace you as if you were already there
And unite myself wholly to you.
Never permit me to be separated from you.
Amen.

Conclusion

All make the sign of the cross as the leader says:

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

Others: Amen.

Leader: Let us praise the Lord.

Others: And give God thanks.