

## Fifth Sunday of Lent, Cycle A

Ezekiel 37:12-14 and John 11:1-45

Perhaps Jesus is curing my blindness, for I have been feeling hopeful this week, despite the worsening pandemic. This hopefulness has been buoyed up by stories of kindness and healing. In Assisi, for example, people confined to their homes have opened their windows to sing to their lonely neighbors across the street. In Spain, every evening at a designated hour, everyone applauds the valiant healthcare workers. The air in China's cities is clearing, as is the water in Venice. Many scholars agree that the increase in empathy and solidarity many are experiencing is creating the potential for positive social change ([Philadelphia Inquirer, 3/23/20](#)).

Vulnerability is a great opportunity for spiritual growth. When we are strong, we can easily think that we are in charge of our lives to a destructive degree. We can become tyrants, forcing our agenda, taking more than we need. However, when we are vulnerable, we have to allow God to act. God acts around us in the kindness of others and in the exuberance of nature. God acts through us so we do good. God acts in us, so we fall more deeply in love with God. In this time of great vulnerability, all this is possible for us.

In this Sunday's gospel, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. I want to focus on three things in this rich story of vulnerability. First, Jesus is deeply emotional. He loves Martha, Mary and Lazarus and the crowd remarks on his love for Lazarus. Twice Jesus *groans deeply* with grief (a better translation of *énebrimásato* than *perturbed*). As he is led to the tomb, Jesus weeps. Jesus is immersed in our pain with us! We are not alone. This resurrection is not a performance to prove how powerful Jesus is, but rather an act of great compassion.

Secondly, note the faith of Martha and Mary. Both of them confront Jesus with the same disappointment: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Why not say what we think? God can take it. Yet, the sisters' disappointment is not all of their relationship to Jesus: they want him near, Mary falls at his feet and Martha searches her creed to understand how God is at work. Martha states, "I have come to believe that you are the Christ, coming into the world." *Coming* is the appropriate verb tense because Martha knows that in some way resurrection is happening now, even if death is also happening. The sisters look to Jesus for comfort, accompaniment and possibility, without trying to force their will.

Lastly, at the literal center of the story is the sheer power of God. Jesus declares, "I am the Resurrection and the Life; whoever believes in me, even if they die, will live." Physical death is not a power unto itself. God, who is Life, is all. Physical death is a moment inside of that Life. As St. Teresa of Avila wrote, "It is not death that comes for me; it is Jesus."

Ezekiel gives us a view of the world from God's perspective. Treat yourself to the whole vision in Ez 37:1-14, because it is awesome! God and Ezekiel stand before a vast plain filled with the dried bones of the defeated Israelites. God commands the bones to reconnect themselves. God then commands the Breath/Wind/Spirit to animate them. When the Israelites cry out in verse 11, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely," God replies, "O my people! I will open your graves and have you rise from them." God punctuates this by decreeing, "I have promised it and I will do it." Get out of God's way, O People!

What does this look like? On the first day of the Second Vatican Council, John XXIII spoke to a crowd of pilgrims: "Dear sons and daughters, I feel your voices! Mine is just one lone voice, but it sums up the voice of the whole world. And here, in fact, all the world is represented tonight. We ask for a great day of peace. My own person counts for nothing—it's a brother who speaks to you, but all together, (we) give honor to the impressions of this night, which are always our feelings, which now we express before heaven and earth: faith, hope, love, love of God, all aided along the way in the Lord's holy peace for the work of the good. And so, let us continue to love each other, to look out for each other along the way: to welcome whoever comes close to us, and set aside whatever difficulty it might bring. When you head home, find your children. Hug and kiss your children. And when you find them with tears to dry, give them a good word. Give anyone who suffers a word of comfort. And then, all together, may we always come alive—whether to sing, to breathe, or to cry, but always full of trust in Christ, who helps us and hears us, let us continue along our path."

- ❖ What do you hope will come from this pandemic?
- ❖ Pour out your heart to Jesus. What is his response?