



Bible Study Fifth Sunday of Lent Year A

St. Maria Goretti
and St. Peter Claver
Parishes

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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." John 11:43-44 NABRE

Reading I: Ezekiel 37:12-14

LORD, GIVE ME A FAITH THAT IS ALIVE.

Our Life experiences may sometime leave us numb. Negative experiences tend to deaden our relationships. If a relative, friend or associate hurts us, we move away from or terminate that relationship. Eventually, we become dead to them and them to us. Some live by the adage, "fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me." Many of us have a similar approach in our spiritual life. We are faithful and prayerful in times of need. If the results are slow coming, or not the outcome we expect, we often become discouraged. We develop a dead or dying faith. However, we are called to have a faith that is alive. If we separate ourselves from Jesus we can never receive the life giving grace and strength that comes from His presence.



LORD! GIVE ME A LIVING FAITH?

The first reading from Ezekiel comes after the first eleven verses that describe Ezekiel's vision of the dried bones. In that vision, God spoke to the dry bones of the Israelites through Ezekiel. He raised them from the earth and breathed life into the dry, decayed bones of Israel (v. 5).

Ezekiel was a priest in the temple in Jerusalem when he was exiled to Babylon in 597 B. C. In Babylon, he preached rejection of sin and the restoration of Judah. In this passage he gave hope to his fellow exiles by speaking words of encouragement from the Lord (v. 12). Life in servitude in Babylon was a living death to the Israelites. Their faith resembled dried decaying bones. Only God could restore them. The merciful forgiving God breathed life into them used them to fulfill His plan for salvation of the human race.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: How alive is your faith? Has your faith ever resembled dry bones?

WHO WAS EZEKIEL

Ezekiel (God will strengthen) was a prophet of a priestly family carried captive to Babylon in 597 B.C. when he was about 25 years old. His call to the prophetic ministry came five years later. Ezekiel prophesied to the captives who dwelt by the River Chebar at Tel Abib. He is the author of the Book of Ezekiel.

In his book, Ezekiel identifies himself as a priest, the son of Buzi (1:3). He was married to a woman who was "the desire of his eyes" (24:16). One of the saddest notes of his life was the death of his wife. In Ezek 24:1-2, the prophet was told that on the very day he received this revelation, his wife would die as the armies of Babylon laid siege against the holy city of Jerusalem. Ezekiel's sadness at the death of his wife was to match the grief of God at the sin of Jerusalem. Ezekiel was commanded not to grieve her death; he was to steel himself for this tragedy even as God had prepared Himself for the death of His beloved city (24:15-22). (From Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

Reading II: Romans 8:8-11

LORD, GIVE ME A FAITH THAT IS

ALIVE. St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans is the longest of his epistles. It is a treatise on the basic Gospel of Christ. St. Paul reminds us that as Christians, though baptized in Christ, we still retain the flesh. But the flesh is alien to us because we have a new life that is governed by the Holy Spirit of God. We have become alive in the Holy Spirit by Baptism.

Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, Christians fulfill the divine will which was previously expressed in the law (Romans 8:4). The same Spirit who gives life to the Christian's desire for holiness will also resurrect our bodies on the last day (Romans 8:11). A logical conclusion from this reading is that Christian life is a constant struggle to put to death the evil deeds of the body through life in the Holy Spirit. (Romans 8:13). We must have a faith that is alive. Our faith is alive if we live in the Holy Spirit of God. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Does the Holy Spirit of God dwell in you? How do you know?

Gospel: John 11:1-45

LORD, GIVE ME A FAITH THAT IS ALIVE. Is it common to see dead people in church? In Revelation 3:1, Jesus tells the Church in Sardis that they are a dying church. It had a reputation of being alive, but it was dead. The church was warned to strengthen what was left. One may conclude that the church dies when the faith of its members die. When the body of Christ is weakened or dead, it is because of the destruction of its members, the faithful. During this Fifth Week of Lent, we ask the Lord to revitalize our faith and give us a new sense of holiness that was given to us in the Sacrament of Baptism. Make us passionate about serving Jesus, the son of God. Let us have a faith that is a living relationship with the Holy Trinity. Open our eyes to the gift of the Sacraments. Give us a lifestyle that leads others to Jesus. *Give us a faith that is alive.*

The raising of Lazarus is the seventh Sign in the Book of Signs in the Gospel of St. John. Jesus presented Himself as the Water of Life, the Bread of Life and the Light of Life. Now He presents Himself as the Resurrection and the Life. He revealed that He had power over man's greatest enemy, death. Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem to die and rise from the dead. The raising of Lazarus foretells these events. The climax of this Gospel is in *verses 25-26*, when Jesus declared that He is the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in Him will never die.

When Jesus received word of Lazarus' death, He delayed. Perhaps He knew that Lazarus' death would not be final (*v. 4*). His delay showed His divine purpose (*vv. 5-6*). Lazarus, death before Jesus' arrival, allowed for the clearest revelation that Jesus is the Son of God (*vv. 14-15*). Once in Bethany of Judea, Jesus heard that Lazarus had been dead for four days. Commentators reveal that some Jews believed that the soul lingered in the body for four days. The fourth day meant that the soul had left the body and Lazarus was truly dead. Jesus' response to the anguish of Mary and Martha shows His humanity. He wept (*vv. 30-35*). Note that His compassion prompted prayer and action. With the command to remove the stone, Jesus challenged the faith of both Mary and Martha. Their faith came alive with Jesus commanded Lazarus to come out in the same way he had been buried, wrapped in burial clothing. The miracle shows Jesus', ability to give life. Jesus gave life to Lazarus, who was really dead and gave life to the faith of Mary, Martha and those present (*vv. 41-44*). Jesus gives life to all who believe in Him. He gives life to dead and dying faith. Lord, give me faith that is alive. **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** Is your faith alive, dying or dead? How do you know? What are the signs of a living faith?

Pray About It!

Monday

Be a voice of encouragement today.

Tuesday

Read Ezekiel 37:12-14. Can you "live by the Spirit today?"

Wednesday

Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Thursday

Read John 11:16. Are you prepared to die with Christ?

Friday

Attend Mass and pray the Stations of the Cross.

THE THIRD SCRUTINY

On this Sunday our parish celebrates the Third Scrutiny in preparation for the Baptism of the Catechumens who are to be admitted to the Sacraments of Christian Initiation at the Easter Vigil. Let us join them in prayer.

Father of life and God not of the dead but of the living, you sent your Son to proclaim life, to snatch us from the realm of death, and to lead us to the resurrection.

Free these elect from the death-dealing power of the spirit of evil, so that they may bear witness to their new life in the risen Christ, for he lives and reigns forever and ever.

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RESOURCES: The Sunday Readings Cycle A, Kevin O' Sullivan, O.F.M Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago 1971, pp. 135-141; John Neal M. Flanagan, O.S.M.; Colleagueville Bible Commentary, The Liturgical Press, Colleagueville Minn., p. 999-1000; Living Liturgy Spirituality, Celebration, and Catechesis for Sundays and Solemnities Year A 2017, Joyce Zimmerman, C. PP. S. Kathleen Harmon, S.ND. de N., Christopher W. Canlon, S. M. Liturgical Press Colleagueville, Mn. pp. 90-94; Scripture texts in this work are taken from the New American Bible, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner. From Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

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