

The Fifth Sunday of Lent

Principal Service readings

Ezekiel 37.1-14	The dry bones
Psalms 130	From the depths I cry to you, O Lord
Romans 8.6-11	You live not by natural inclinations but in the Spirit
John 11.1-45	The resurrection of Lazarus

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

The raising of Lazarus

¹A certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' ⁴But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' ⁵Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

⁷Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' ⁸The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' ⁹Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' ¹¹After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' ¹²The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' ¹³Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' ¹⁶Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

¹⁷When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' ²³Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' ²⁴Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' ²⁵Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' ²⁷She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

²⁸When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' ²⁹And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³²When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' ³⁷But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

³⁸Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.' ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

⁴⁵Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

John 11.1-45 NRSV¹

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Comments and Questions

This week we come to the third of three long readings from John. Two weeks ago we had the story about the woman at the well, last week we heard about the man born blind whom Jesus healed, this week we have the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead. Why does John spend so long on these stories? Today we have the peak story disclosing who Jesus is. John calls these occasions signs rather than miracles, and they point to the true identity of Jesus. This is the seventh and final sign in John, and a fitting one to conclude the public ministry of Jesus. After this, the gospel story quickly moves on to the events surrounding the Last Supper and the Crucifixion. Today's story is full of misunderstandings, but these show how much more Jesus knows than the disciples. For example, even though Jesus is talking about Lazarus being dead, the disciples think he is merely asleep, until Jesus says plainly, 'Lazarus is dead'. Even Thomas misunderstands and thinks the disciples are going to die with Jesus. Jesus proclaims himself to be 'the resurrection and the life', but no one is prepared for him to raise Lazarus from the dead. Jesus thanks God for the opportunity for people to believe that he has been sent by God the Father.

Quotations

1

Let every man and woman count himself immortal. Let him catch the revelation of Jesus in his resurrection. Let him say not merely, 'Christ is risen,' but 'I shall rise.'

Phillips Brooks, 1835-1893

2

People have been told so often that resurrection is just a metaphor, and means Jesus died and was glorified - in other words, he went to Heaven, whatever that means. And they've never realized that the word 'resurrection' simply didn't mean that.

N. T. Wright, 1948–

3

If one does away with the fact of the Resurrection, one also does away with the Cross, for both stand and fall together, and one would then have to find a new centre for the whole message of the gospel.

Hans Urs von Balthasar, 1905–1988

National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Related topics

For further study:

Resurrection

Closing Prayer

Out of death, O God, you summon life:
dry bones to stand up among the living,
Lazarus to come forth from the tomb.
Breathe your Spirit into us,
unbind us and set us free:
for your glory is the human being fully alive
and our life, the sight of your glory.
We ask this through Jesus Christ,
who is one with you and the Holy Spirit,
now and for ever.

Celebrating the Christian Year 2, Lent 5, Year A²