

5th Sunday of Lent A

Ezekiel 37:12-14

Ezekiel, a priest in training, along with thousands of other Jews was taken into exile in 597 BC. Four years later on his thirtieth birthday, he was eligible to become a full-fledged priest. In Nippur, a Babylonian City, 1000 miles from Jerusalem, there wasn't much to do--no temple--no sacrifices —only teaching the Law of Moses. Then in 593 BC he was blasted with his first vision.⁴ He was the first prophet to receive the call to prophesy outside the Holy Land. He thought that the exiles were the hope of Israel's restoration, once God's allotted time for the exile had been accomplished. The famous vision of the dry bones in the first part of chapter 37 expresses his firm belief in a forthcoming restoration, Israel rising to new life from the graveyard of Babylon. But Ezekiel's new covenant was to see its true fulfillment only in the New Testament.⁵ Ezekiel is called "The Prophet of Divine Fidelity" because he emphasizes the fact that God is faithful in his threats as well as in his promises.²⁰

12 Thus says the Lord God: O my people, I will open your graves. This represents a place of captivity where hope seems to die. **and have you rise from them, and bring you back to the land of Israel.** This is a prophecy of the restoration of Israel.³ To be restored to the land which is their birthright would be very much like being raised from the dead.² In the minds of the people there was no more hope for Israel's recovery than there would be for scattered bones to pull together and grow flesh and begin to live.¹⁹

13 Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves. This is also a promise of life beyond death.² **and have you rise from them, O my people!** This is a prophecy of resurrection to the whole house of Israel. It portends more than the raising of the bodies of dead people at some future time. It promises the raising of a beaten people from the grave of defeat, slavery, humiliation, and despair. It promises to restore all they imagine they have lost and more.²¹

14 I will put my spirit. God would breathe life again into His spiritually dead people.⁷ **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.**

Romans 8:8-11

Brothers and sisters: Paul teaches that there are two ways to live on earth: The first is spiritual and focused on God and the second is fleshly and centered on self.⁸ The choice is obvious by what occupies a person's time, money and thoughts.

8 Those who are in the flesh. There is a great difference between flesh and being "in the flesh." We don't have much choice on this side of heaven with regard to being flesh. It is the only instrument we have for doing the good works of the Spirit that lives in us. But we certainly can choose not to be a slave to the body.² **cannot please God.** Life according to the flesh is spelled out in 1 John 2:16 where it includes: carnal allurements (inordinate desire for sensuality), enticements for the eye (greed, for the eyes are the windows of the soul), and the life of empty show (ostentation, pride, arrogance and INDEPENDENCE of God). After original sin man is pulled in two different directions: either he seeks God above all things and contends, with God's grace, against the inclinations of his own concupiscence; or else he lets himself be overwhelmed by the disordered passions of the flesh. The former lifestyle is "life in the Spirit", the latter, life "according to the flesh". There are only two possible ways of living on this earth: either we live a supernatural life, or we live an animal life.²²

9But you are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God Paul uses "Spirit of God," "Spirit of Christ" and "Christ" almost interchangeably to express the divine indwelling.³ dwells in you. The baptized Christian is not only "in the Spirit," but the vitalizing power of the Spirit is now said to dwell in him.⁹ Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. Note that the apostle does not reject the substance of flesh but shows that the Spirit must be infused into it.²⁰

10But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, Your body is still subject to death and decay because of Original Sin.⁸ This is so inevitable that Paul sees the body as already dead. It would make more sense if it read, "the body is doomed to die because of sin."²² the spirit is alive because of righteousness. That is, because one is in right relationship with God.⁴

11If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, The life in the Spirit means living according to God's commands. It influences everything a Christian does as he is constantly trying to bring his thoughts, yearnings, desires and actions into line with what God is asking of him. IN EVERYTHING HE DOES HE TRIES TO FOLLOW THE INSPIRATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.²² the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit dwelling in you. When God resurrects the bodies of the saints on the Last Day, he will complete the process of divine adoption that began in Baptism with the infusion of the Spirit into our souls.⁸

John 11: 1-45

John has written the story of Lazarus in such a way as to prefigure and to prepare the reader for Jesus' resurrection. Both accounts speak of: --a mourning Mary at the tomb, --a cave tomb closed with a stone,--grave clothes plus a face cloth, and --a special role given to Thomas. The first 12 chapters of this book are sometimes referred to as "The Book of Signs" which tell of seven signs that show forth the Glory of God in the life of Jesus. The Raising of Lazarus is the sixth sign.¹⁷ The enemies of Jesus tried to stone him and later to arrest him. Jesus went to Bethany and stayed with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. It was just a few weeks before his own death. Then he left these dear friends as well as his enemies and went to Perea across the Jordan and that is where he got the message about Lazarus.¹⁰

1Now a man was ill, Lazarus from Bethany, Lazarus was a beloved friend of Jesus who lived in a small village about two miles east of Jerusalem.¹⁴ the village of Mary There is a question whether this Mary of Bethany, Mary Magdalene, and the "sinful" woman who anointed Jesus' feet in Galilee were one, two, or three different women. It seems likely that they are all different people.²⁰ and her sister Martha.

2Mary 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.

3So the sisters sent word to Jesus saying, "Master, the one you love is ill."

4When Jesus heard this he said, "This illness is not to end in death, Lazarus will in fact die, but this will not be his ultimate fate at this time.⁹ but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

5Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

6So when he heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place where he was. The delay of Jesus proves fatal for Lazarus. This period of waiting is not a mistake, but part of his plan to

generate faith in the disciples. Raising the dead to new life will have a more profound effect on them than raising the sick to health.¹⁴

7Then after this he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

8The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just trying to stone you, and you want to go back there?" Stoning was the form of capital punishment for blasphemy. The people tried to stone Jesus at least twice: first when he proclaimed that he was the Son of God and that he existed from eternity (by saying that he "was" before Abraham lived) and second, when he revealed that he and the Father were one. These attempts failed because Jesus' hour had not yet arrived.¹²

9Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in a day? If one walks during the day, (With God) he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world.

10But if one walks at night, (In opposition to God) he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

11He said this, and then told them, "Our friend Lazarus is asleep, but I am going to awaken him." This is an euphemism for biological death used in a number of other places in the New Testament, but the disciples take Jesus' words literally, thinking Lazarus has only to be awakened.¹⁴

12So the disciples said to him, "Master, if he is asleep, he will be saved."

13But Jesus was talking about his death, while they thought that he meant ordinary sleep.

14So then Jesus said to them clearly, "Lazarus has died.

15And I am glad for you that I was not there, that you may believe. Let us go to him."

16So Thomas, called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go to die with him." All the apostles knew that Jesus was a dead man if he set foot in or near Jerusalem again. They also knew that there was a real possibility that they would be killed with him.¹⁶ Thomas is thought to have been martyred in India in 72 A.D.¹⁰ Only St. John will stay faithful in Jesus' hour of greatest need.¹²

17When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. This is mentioned to make it clear that Lazarus was truly dead. Before medicine could distinguish between being comatose and being dead people were occasionally buried alive. In order to eliminate this grisly possibility, it was the Jewish burial practice to go out to the cemetery to examine the dead for a period of three days. There was an opinion among the rabbis that the soul hovered near the body for three days but after that there was not hope of resuscitation. In this case, the three-day period has passed.¹¹

18Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, only about two miles away.

19And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother.

20When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. She was doubtlessly "sitting shiv'ah" which refers to the Jewish custom of sitting in mourning for seven days following the death of a deceased member of the family. The mourner sits without shoes on the floor or on a low stool in the home of the deceased and abstains from all ordinary work and diversions and even from required synagogue prayers, while friends visit to comfort and to pray with the mourner.¹¹

21Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Martha confesses a faith in Jesus that recognizes that God is the source of Jesus' powers. This separates her from those crowds that are amazed by Jesus' deeds and divided over his identity.²⁰

22But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you."

23Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise."

²⁴Martha said to him, “I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day.” This doctrine was currently believed in Judaism except among the Sadducees who denied that our bodies would live again on the last day.¹⁴

²⁵Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection Jesus is the Resurrection because by his victory over death he is the cause of the resurrection of all men.¹² That will take place at the last day, at the end of the world.¹³ (CCC 1001) Our Body will be reunited with our soul for all eternity.¹⁵ (CCC 1005) and the life; Here Jesus is referring not only to that life which begins beyond the grave, but also to the supernatural life which grace brings to the soul of man when he is still a wayfarer on this earth.¹²

²⁶whoever believes in me, even if he dies, (Physically) will live, (Spiritually) and everyone who lives (Spiritually) and believes in me will never die. (Spiritually) Do you believe this?” For the believer, death is not the end; it is simply the step to eternal life, a change of dwelling place.¹²

²⁷She 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.”

²⁸When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary secretly, saying, “The teacher is here and is asking for you.” This is the summons that every Christian must obey with the same quickness that characterizes Mary’s response.⁹

²⁹As soon as she heard this, she rose quickly and went to him.

³⁰For Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still where Martha had met him.

³¹So 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.

³²When 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.”

³³When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her weeping, he became perturbed and deeply troubled, and said, Though left unexplained, Jesus is probably upset with the Jews who are now weeping with Mary but who will soon betray him to hostile authorities. He foresees that the raising of Lazarus, while strengthening the faith of some, will also occasion the unbelief and treachery of others.¹⁴

³⁴“Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Sir, come and see.”

³⁵And Jesus wept. This is the shortest verse in the Bible.¹² Jesus is said to have wept here for Lazarus and two other times: He wept over Jerusalem and in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he died. Jesus, who became man in every respect except sin, experienced a full range of human emotions.¹³ (CCC 478)

³⁶So the Jews said, “See how he loved him.”

³⁷But 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?”

³⁸So Jesus, perturbed again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay across it. This was to keep the animals out.

³⁹Jesus 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.” It was not their custom to embalm.

⁴⁰Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?”

⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus raised his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you for hearing me. Notice that Jesus begins with thanksgiving which *precedes* the event. In the prayer of Jesus, thanksgiving is offered before the gift is given.¹³ (CCC 2604)

⁴²I know that you always hear me; This implies that Jesus constantly made such petitions.¹³ (CCC 2604) The will of Jesus and the Father are one.⁹ but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me.” Jesus is not just a man with wonder-working power, but he is the emissary of the Father of life.⁹

⁴³And when he had said this, he cried out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”

⁴⁴The 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.” In chapter 20 we are told that Jesus’ burial garments remained in the tomb, perhaps with the connotation that he would have no more use for them since he was never to die again. Therefore, some scholars suggest that it is because Lazarus will die again that he comes forth with his burial garments.¹⁸

⁴⁵Now many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he had done began to believe in him. Sunshine hardens clay and softens wax. The same act caused different reactions among the Jewish authorities as some began to believe in him and from this day on, others, according to v 53, plotted to kill him. The greatest miracle that Jesus performed is the catalyst that causes the Jewish authorities to plot his death. The very act of life-giving ends in death-dealing.¹ In case you have wondered what ever happened to Lazarus, according to papers supplied by the Cathedral of St. Lazarus of Autun, France: Sometime after the dispersion of the apostles in 42 AD and during the early days of the Christian suppression, Lazarus, together with other Christians, were cast adrift by hostile Jews in a flimsy, leaky boat that they hoped would perish at sea. However, the Christians made it to Larnaca on the island of Cyprus where Lazarus disembarked and lived for more than thirty years. He was eventually buried there after suffering for the Faith. The journey of his relics is quite complicated but it has been proved that they were recognized and honored in Autun as early as the 10th century.¹⁵

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) The Commentary Notes from Sean Innerst and Tim Gray, (2) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers: 2002” by Aelred Rosser, (3) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1999” by Lawrence E. Mick, (4) “Story Of Stories” by Karen Lee Thorp, (5) “St. Joseph Edition: The New American Bible,” (6) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (7) “The Bread of Life: Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken and Marie Finn, (8) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans,” (9) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (10) “The Founding Of Christendom” by Warren Carroll, (11) “The Gospel of St. John” by Stephen K. Ray, (12) “The Navarre Bible: St. John,” (13) “The Catechism Of The Catholic Church,” (14) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John,” (15) “Relics” by Joan Carroll Cruz, (16) “The Twelve: The Lives of the Apostles After Calvary” by C. Bernard Ruffin, (17) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: John” by Neal M. Flanagan, O.S.M., (18) “The Gospel According To John” by Raymond Brown, (19) “The Book Of Ezekiel” by James C. Turro, (20) The St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Online founded by Dr. Scott Hahn, and (21) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers” by James L. Weaver.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.