

# Fifth Sunday of Lent

## *The Raising of Lazarus*

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### **Suggested Environment**

Choose or create a quiet space in your home. To help provide a prayerful atmosphere, perhaps light a candle and open a Bible to the scripture gospel passage for today.

### **Liturgical Readings for the Fifth Sunday of Lent**



**EZEKIEL 37:12-14**

*God will raise believers from their graves.*

**PSALM 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8**

*God redeems us from the depths of despair.*

**ROMANS 8:8-11**

*Christ's Spirit dwelling within us is our life.*

**JOHN 11:1-45**

*Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.*

### **Focus**

As for his beloved friend, Lazarus, Jesus is our resurrection and life.



## **Opening Song** (To download, visit [ocp.org/renew-music](http://ocp.org/renew-music).)

*"Be Not Afraid," Bob Dufford, SJ*



## **Opening Prayer**

If you are with others, take turns reciting the verses and repeat the responses together:

### **R. 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.**



## **The Gospel of the Lord**

*"I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live. . . ." (John 11:25)*

**Reflect**

*What word, phrase, or image from the scripture reading touches your heart or connects to your experience? If you are with others, share your response with them, or write it here response here:*

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**Old Testament Connections**

Just before his death, Moses commissioned Joshua (a name equivalent to “Jesus”) to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land and exhorted the people to remain faithful to the covenant God had established with them (Dt 31:1-29).

Moses’ words echo in those of Jesus in the coming chapters of John’s Gospel as Jesus, the new Joshua, gives his farewell address before his crucifixion and death. The author of the Book of Deuteronomy tells us that Moses was unequaled for “all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform,” (Dt 34:11). Jesus offers us the definitive sign, the resurrection from the dead. Moses lives only in his words; the risen Jesus lives in his community.

Another background theme in this passage reminds us of the opening scene in this Gospel: John the Baptist proclaiming at the beginning of his ministry, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’” (Jn 1:23) The evangelist John calls our attention to the words of the prophet Isaiah about the Lord coming directly to his new Jerusalem.

If this seems far afield from the raising of Lazarus from the dead, here is the basis for the connection. Lazarus was dead—completely dead for four days, to stress the metaphor. He was like Jerusalem in the days of Isaiah, a grand city totally laid waste by the Babylonians, destined to live no more. But Isaiah had the faith to tell his compatriots

that God would not let this destruction stand. God would come on a straight path, levelling hills, filling in valleys, to re-establish his presence in Jerusalem. And so it happened with the rebuilding of the second Temple.

John the Baptist, as a prophet of a new era, in the mold of Moses and Isaiah, saw God returning to his people in an unexpected and unprecedented presence—that is, in the person of Jesus. This is how the community of the evangelist John understood Jesus and offered that image to us. The Temple of the evangelist’s time was as dead as it was in Isaiah’s time. But in this new era it was replaced, but not by another temple or another city. It was replaced by God himself in the person of Jesus. The great and singular God of Israel did not simply lead the nation back to its former glory, he came himself into the human family!

Jesus is the new Temple who gives us a new understanding of the Feast of Tabernacles. The evangelist John has also showed us, at the beginning of this Gospel, Jesus overturning the money changers’ tables, a symbol of the Temple’s destruction, and proclaiming that he would build the new Temple in three days.

For the community of the evangelist John, the resurrection of Lazarus was the symbol of new life. Jesus died, as we all do, “emptied himself ... and becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:7-8). Paul’s words capture the paradox of death followed by resurrection that we are left to ponder. In this mode of thinking, death has lost its sting because eternal life begins in our lifetime and transitions into a deeper unity with the divine. Eternal life begins with the acceptance that God has come to offer his love to us in the form of Jesus, truly a human person and truly God endowed with our flesh.

*Adapted from a reflection by Martin Lang in John: I Am the Vine, a forthcoming part of the RENEW Scripture Series.*

## **Reflect**

*The sisters of Lazarus assumed that the death of their brother meant the end of their daily relationship with him. How does your faith help you deal*

*with the prospect of losing friends or loved ones as a result of the pandemic? If you are with others, share your response with them, or write it here:*

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**Meditation**

Bob, a generous and amiable man of deep faith, volunteered at our RENEW office with his wife, Marge, every week for many years. There was nothing Bob could not fix. When this couple joined us for prayer before an annual staff picnic, Bob—in his 80s, but still with a twinkle in his eye—shared a powerful story with us. Once, from a fishing boat off the Jersey Shore, Bob saw a man fall from another vessel in the distance. The man had been cleaning fish and, as he tried to empty the fish remains into the water, the rope attached to the bucket pulled him overboard.

The others on the fisherman’s boat began to scream for help, and Bob asked his own captain to assist. The captain refused, because he had not seen the man fall. When Bob insisted, describing the accident, the captain still refused. He argued that he didn’t want people to think the man fell from their boat. Bob, with a power he felt was coming from outside himself, persisted until the captain turned the board toward the spot where the man had gone overboard. There was no sign of the man—not even a ripple. The lost man’s wife began to weep.

Bob cried out to the Lord for his help and mercy. He followed the rope, and he and others found the man and dragged him on board. The man lay seemingly lifeless. Bob again cried to the Lord for help. He untangled the rope, which had tightened around the man’s neck, gave him chest compressions, and breathed into his mouth. Bob refused to give up. The police were now on the scene, bringing the boat to shore and assisting Bob. When all seemed to be lost, the man began to breathe, got up, and was able to walk off the boat. Bob and all who

witnessed the event were astonished.

With this story, Bob testified to the power of Jesus' love and mercy that brought this man back to life, reaffirming Bob's faith not only in the resurrection of Christ but also in the possibility of God bringing new life to our own seemingly hopeless situations.

As Jesus arrives at the tomb, burdened not only with his grief but also with the deep sorrow of Mary and Martha, he is deeply moved. In his grief, Jesus first thanks God, and then he calls Lazarus forth from the tomb. Lazarus comes to life, bound by the wrappings of the burial cloth. All are astonished. And Jesus says to his friends, "Untie him and let him go free." Lazarus lets himself be unbound.

We are often bound by fear, despair, and a sense of powerlessness in the face of adversity. Bob could have turned away from the sight of the man overboard and continued his fishing expedition. Bob chose to come to the man's aid and trust in the power and mercy of God. This God experience continued to strengthen Bob as he faced his own physical diminishment and as he prepared to transition into a "deeper unity with the divine."

We have God's power within us to free us and to free others who are bound or entangled. Lent is a good time to consider what we need to be freed from. What is binding you—making it difficult for you to breathe or what do you feel entangled in? What are the places in your life, your relationship with another person, your sense of your own value, your emotional or physical health where you are resigned to death? Do you believe that God can bring you to a place of new life?

Jesus waits for us with merciful love and tender compassion. He waits to unbind us, breathe into us a spirit of freedom, and set us on the path of life.

## **Reflect**

*Martha was distraught because Jesus did not arrive in time to heal her brother. Have you ever felt as if God delayed in helping you in a difficult*

*situation? When? During this pandemic? How was your relationship with God affected by that experience?*

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*The death of a relative or acquaintance is also the death of the possibility of reconciling any differences we have had with those persons. How do you try to heal such differences while there is time? How hard is that to do? Why?*

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*Jesus tells Martha that those who believe in him, even if they die, shall live; and then he asks one of the most important questions in the gospels: “Do you believe this?” How do you answer? Why do you answer as you do?*

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## **Live Lent!**

- † Identify something from which you seek release, healing or new life. Imagine that you can hold this situation in your hands—pray to Jesus to open your heart and hands and to heal you.
- † Participate in online prayer and faith-sharing opportunities offered by your parish or diocese or by RENEW International during the pandemic.
- † Spend time prayerfully reviewing your plans for this Lent, making any adjustments that you think are needed, especially in light of the pandemic.



## Closing Prayer

Pray together:

*God of freedom, you loose all bonds that hold us in darkness and sin. Heal the places where our wounds and pride have kept us distant from you and one another. Free us from our tombs, O Christ. Amen.*

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