

Lent 5 – Passiontide begins

Collect:

Gracious Father,
you gave up your Son
out of love for the world:
lead us to ponder the mysteries of his passion,
that we may know eternal peace
through the shedding of our Saviour's blood,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

1st Reading : Ezekiel 37 1-14

The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I said, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know."

Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!'⁵ This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord."

So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.'¹² Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord

Gospel Reading; John 11 1-45

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”

“But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?”

Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light. ¹⁰ It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.”

After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”

His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” ¹ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Jesus Comforts the Sisters of Lazarus

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.³⁴ “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

Jesus wept.

Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. “Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

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

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

Hymn: Lord thy church on earth is seeking



Lord, Thy Church on Earth is seeking
Thy renewal from above;
Teach us all the art of speaking
With the accent of Thy love.
We would heed Thy great commission;
“Go ye into every place;
Preach, baptize, fulfill My mission,
Serve with love and share My grace.”

Freedom give to those in bondage,
Lift the burdens caused by sin;
Give new hope, new strength and courage,
Grant release from fears within.
Light for darkness, joy for sorrow;
Love for hatred, peace for strife.
These and countless blessings follow
As the Spirit gives new life.

In the streets of every city
Where the bruised and lonely dwell,
We shall show the Savior’s pity,
We shall of His mercy tell.
In all lands and with all races
We shall serve and seek to bring
All the world to render praises,
Christ, to Thee, Redeemer, King.

Homily

Jesus is always calling us out of the darkness and that's exactly what he is doing for Lazarus in today's gospel. Lazarus has been dead for four days... "Lazarus come out" Jesus calls him out of the tomb, out of the darkness, out of death.

The miracle of this story is not in Jesus calling Lazarus but rather Lazarus's response - his first step towards Jesus voice. There are many reasons that could keep in in the tomb for example I can hear Lazarus cry back, "I'm all bound up, it's too dark. I can't see my way forward, I'm too exhausted, leave me alone."

These reasons maybe familiar to all of us for not taking that first step to God calling us to be more. The first step is always the hardest one when we attempt to move out of our comfort zone of all that's familiar. The first steps are difficult, scary, and often overwhelming. They leave us stumbling in the dark unsure of where we are treading.

We can often feel like retreating into our caves, our tombs when life overwhelms us, and as we hear on the news about the death toll rising on a daily basis, we find ourselves retreating more and more into the darkness - negativity surrounds us and we stop us hearing God's instruction to us. To come out does not mean to physically come out of our tombs/houses as the government advises the opposite! But rather amid all the uncertainty the call to 'come out' means we learn to walk again, love again, live again. We are being forced to stop and by doing so, our world is beginning to heal - less planes and cars mean the air is less polluted, in Venice the waters are clearer due to less boat activity. Through the turmoil we see our communities joining forces to help the vulnerable, to name but a few there have been the offers to help with food and prescriptions, a new book swap scheme in the churches set up and run by the community, which although is temporarily suspended whilst the church is closed, is a new way of using the buildings going forward. In our hymn we would have sung together the words

Lord, Thy Church on Earth is seeking
Thy renewal from above;
Teach us all the art of speaking
With the accent of Thy love.

All these ways to come together and care for our world are that first step which free us from the circumstances that bind and allow us to walk towards the light and life which Christ calls us to.

The choice we need to make is to stop and breathe... to hear God's call and take the steps to reflect on what it really means to love thy neighbour, because the opposite is to think only of ourselves (as many are by stockpiling and not adhering to social distancing) waiting for the storm to pass? The choice is ours..... will we stay in the tomb or listen to the one voice that matters and come out?

Prayer

Heavenly father

Thy Church on Earth is indeed seeking Thy renewal from above; in our fractured world where so many are dying from the Corona virus we pray for new hope, new strength and courage. We pray

especially for those isolated and the NHS staff who are working tirelessly to save lives we ask you Lord to Lighten the darkness.

In all lands and with all races, we thank you for the unity shown throughout the world to overcome the deadly virus, we thank you for the scientists and the key workers who keep our lives functioning. We thank you that people who were often overlooked are now being recognized for their wonderful contribution in our communities e.g keyworkers such as supermarket workers, carers, cleaners and teachers, mechanics, our local shop workers the list goes on. As we continue to serve one another help us to breathe and to listen to your voice to bring comfort and peace.

Amen