

Fifth Sunday of Lent, Year A
Calling the Dead to New Life
Ezekiel 37: 12-14; Romans 8: 8-11; John 11: 1-45

Each of us has experienced grief and sorrow, the anguish of loneliness, the pain of separation from loved ones, the loss of someone dear to us, the worry and anxiety of those closest to our hearts and the concern about the future. The death of Lazarus leaves a big impact and huge void in the lives of those who loved him. The sisters of Lazarus felt that they could have done better and Mary expressed regret "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Jesus knows pain better than we do. And now, being moved with deepest emotion, being troubled in spirit, his tears mingled with those of Martha, Mary, and friends so naturally. "See how much he loved him!" people remarked when they saw him weep. The tears of Jesus now flow for us and for all who suffer everywhere. Lazarus is a symbol of agonizing humanity. But Jesus did more than weep that day. He brought Lazarus back to life again. Just as Martha, Mary, and their friends are symbols of suffering humanity, so is Lazarus a symbol of humanity's deliverance, of our ultimate and final victory over sin, pain, suffering, and death.

Jesus experienced deep grief and sorrow at the death of Lazarus, like Martha, Mary and their friends. Lazarus' sisters were devastated, but in their midst was Christ who changed everything. As man, he wept for Lazarus; as God, he raised him from the dead.

In the story of the man born blind, the mighty deed involved the man carrying out the instruction on his own. He needs personal participation and involvement in the work of salvation. In the story of raising Lazarus from the dead, he involves the larger community. He desires community participation and involvement to accomplish the work.

For us, Lazarus is a symbol of the goal of Lent—for the Church, for the catechumens, and for each one of us, who has been concerned not only with the pain of living but also with our personal growing up and coming to new life at Easter—our conversion, our becoming new again. Lent is a season we endeavour to bring back to life things and situations that have been dead.

To bring back situations that are dead to new life, we need Christ's presence. We must try to imitate Martha. The story presents her as a model of faith. In

her hour of grief, she ran to the Lord and poured out her sorrow to him. And when Jesus challenged her to believe, she made a wonderful profession of faith: "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world." Lent is not all about suffering and sacrifice. It's a corridor to new life. It's the door that Jesus opens to invite us into that new life in faith.

Dead situations abound in our lives. One may be dead spiritually and may need some energy and support to regain the trust and belief in God and the Church. Here the support of the believing community becomes paramount. The community gives assurance that such belief in God is not in futility.

It may be a problem of prayer life, where we sometimes find ourselves in situations where prayer makes no meaning any more. Special prayers and community encouragement may inject new insights in one's prayer life. A deeper understanding that prayer is mainly about one's personal relationship with God. Several dead relationships need to be brought to life. Dead relationships can include irreconcilable and broken ties among members of the same family, jealousies at places of work, excessive gossip among members of the communities, church or otherwise and unforgiving attitude towards our perceived enemies. Christ is the giver of life even in our broken relationships. We need to trust and believe in him.

Several people today are economically dead. No regular income, no employment and no proper business. Struggle is the pattern of their life. They are looking for some hope for a better life. An enabling environment coupled with commitment and hard-work is the way to go. Again the State and society become very crucial here in helping them to come to new life, economically.

There are social and justice deaths. The situation where the poor and the most vulnerable are neglected, overlooked and systematically marginalized due to policies and systems, which do not put their plight into consideration. A government "of and for" the good hearted and God fearing people is key.

Lent is all about reaching the resurrection: renewing our faith, entering a new life free of old sins, reconciling damaged relationships, and living in the Spirit of God more than we ever did before. Although we have to pass through Calvary and Good Friday, we shall definitely have our Easter and shall ever live in the resurrection! This means that nothing bad can ever happen to us that will not be transformed into blessings if Jesus is the Lord of our lives. Let us have faith in Jesus and make him Lord of lives.

Fourth Sunday of Lent, Year A
Christ the Light of the World and of Our Lives

1 Samuel 16: 1b, 6-7, 10-13a; Ephesians 5: 8-14; John 9: 1-41.

The fourth Sunday of Lent is traditionally observed in the Church as *Laetare Sunday*. *Laetare* is the Latin word for rejoice. On this Sunday, the Church invites her members to rejoice as we get to the middle of the Lenten season and so, gradually approaching Easter. We have to rejoice because we are also slowly moving from darkness to the light that awaits us at Easter, Christ the Paschal light. We rejoice today because God is bringing us to the light of Christ in various ways.

We celebrate the revelation that the true appearance before God is about inner disposition. This was the lesson Samuel learnt when God asked him to anoint David as King instead of his elder brothers who had better physical qualities. God does not judge us based on our physical appearances as men do, but that He judges our hearts. The heart here refers to the inner chamber of a person where one interacts with God. God is not interested in our outward appearances but in our internal disposition towards Him. If our disposition is good, He might also improve on our physical appearances.

The light illumines us through the Scriptures today on the understanding of suffering. There is genuine curiosity on the part of the disciples. Their question reflects the Jewish belief that a person is born disabled due to the sin of his parents. Suffering is not punishment but an occasion to reveal God's power and glory.

We celebrate the light on clarifying the Sabbath Law. Here Jesus declares that the person is more important than the Sabbath law. He makes it clear that the Sabbath is meant for the person and not the other way round.

The finally we celebrate the confirmation that one who has encountered Christ cannot afford to keep quiet. The neighbours of the man, born blind, are curious to know how his eyes were opened. This gives an opportunity to the man to proclaim Jesus' works to the eager crowd. He becomes an instant witness. The parents were afraid to talk about the mighty deed of

Jesus, but the man was not afraid to testify despite the intimidation that he faced from the authorities. There is a movement from fear to courage.

The various ways in which light comes to us challenge us to move out of darkness. To know that when it comes to human needs and suffering it is God we must obey and not our fellow human beings. In that way we learn to give God true glory by accepting the truth whether it challenges what we know or the way think or not.

It is also an occasion to let go of prejudice. Sometimes we promote what does not actually deserve, due to appearances. At the same time we demote what should be great on the basis of impressions.

These lessons can help all of us to move out of darkness. The theme of a journey, from darkness to light, is brought out in the Gospel, through the account of the miracle in the life of the man born blind. Till he met Jesus, the light of the world, he was in darkness all his life. He allowed Jesus to touch his eyes, obeyed his suggestion to go to the pond called 'Shiloh' and was given sight.

The season of Lent invites us to discover the power of Jesus and to allow him to open our eyes so that we can firmly declare him as prophet, Son of Man and Lord of our lives. As for the poor blind man, not only did he receive his sight, but his heart was filled with light as a result of his encounter with Jesus. Christ is indeed the light of the world and of our lives. Let us reflect this Lent, on how much we need his light for our own lives and for the world. More so that we become the bearers of light every day and everywhere.

As one retreat master once told us, "We are called to get on our feet. To be on the move, to be out-going. The only time we may be seated is the **time to pray, time to eat and time to learn.**"

Third Sunday of Lent, Year A
Christ is The Source of Living Water

Exodus 17: 3-7; Romans 5: 1-2, 6-7, 8-9; John 4: 5-42.

It is a natural inclination for people to seek for answers for things that happen in their life. It is a never-ending thirst. The search for answers to the problems facing the people has increased so much in our time. Coupled with the search for answers is the growing urgency to require instant answers and an easier way of solving problems. This attitude to want instant solutions and easy way out is making people commit crimes and sins against God and against others. Sacrifice and perseverance are not considered part of normal life.

Today's Readings teach us about the living water, that leads us to everlasting life. The Israelites felt thirsty in the desert. They complained to God, who gave them fresh water to drink at Horeb. St Paul says: "The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rm 5:5). And Jesus speaks of this same water, as he promises the Samaritan woman: "Whoever drinks the water, I shall give, will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him [her] a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn 4:14).

The story of the Samaritan woman is an example of one who is thirsty and researching for the right thing. In her case we can say she has a thirsty for meeting the right man. Her thirst for the right man has not been satisfied after five husbands plus the one she was living with.

By the grace of God, she meets Jesus and her experience is beyond her comprehension. She meets Jesus in unusual circumstances. She is the most unlikely person to have such an encounter with Jesus. So many barriers separated her from Jesus. He was a Jew and she a Samaritan—two communities that lived in bitter enmity. He was a man and she a woman—the opposite genders were not supposed to have any interaction in public. He, a Jewish rabbi and she a Samaritan woman, ostracized (detested) by everyone because of her questionable character. She comes to the well at the most unlikely time—the hot noon, when she could be alone, not in the company of other women. She was rejected and shunned, and on her own has to provide for her most basic needs.

The Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus, is very brief, yet it leaves a deep impression on her. She has no training and no commission to go and speak about Jesus. She is a reject of society, a woman with no name, no social standing. Yet there is something attractive, compelling and authentic about her witness, so

they come out in large numbers to see Jesus and listen to him. She may be what she is, but she bears witness to Jesus, based on her personal experience. She speaks of what she knows. Her focus is on Jesus, not on herself.

The story at the well also teaches about the progression of how we can come to know, accept and bear witness to Jesus. Firstly, she is honest and admits the truth about her life. Secondly, she is open and accepts the truth about Jesus. Thirdly, she is enthusiastic and tells others about the truth she has found. We don't need to be experts. We don't need to know all, there is to know. All that we need is a personal experience of the Saviour, which we should communicate to others, and leave the results to God.

She is a summary of how people come to understand Jesus: first as a Jew; Second as a prophet; then as the Messiah; finally as the Saviour of the world. She is one of the first witnesses of John's Gospel who leads others to Jesus. Her past does not hinder her from being a messenger of Good News. She has a story to tell. **At long last she has met the right man.**

Jesus alone understands our predicament and problems. He sees our heart and recognizes in us children of God. Like to the Samaritan woman, he promises us 'living water', the stream of the love of God, so that we can live. Water is essential for our physical survival, and our bodies signal us when it's time to drink fluids to stay healthy. Likewise, water is necessary for our spiritual survival, albeit a different sort of water - the LIVING water, the baptismal water that purifies us for eternal life, the holy water that enables us to have abundant life in Christ now.

Today, in our journey to the new Promised Land, we also experience thirst in various forms. We may be thirsty of healing from a long-standing illness, for employment after many years of fruitless searching, for financial breakthrough after a long time of toil and hard work, for a child following many years of fruitless marriage, for peace and happiness in a troublesome marriage and for salvation in the midst of so many challenges. Such problems may have led us to murmur against God and begin to seek solutions elsewhere.

In the midst of these difficulties, we can always approach Christ represented by the ministers of the Gospel who are also representatives of Moses. Christ is the true living water that can quench our thirst and the right man to lead us to Salvation.

Second Sunday of Lent, Year A
Trusting In God and Obeying his Commands
Genesis 12: 1-4; Timothy 1: 8-10; Matthew 17: 1-9.

It is a natural inclination to remain and stay where we are. Moving from familiar territory to unchartered land can prove to be daunting undertaking. Perhaps, many of us have had an experience of leaving our homes and familiar cities for a strange land. This can be as a result of school, education, employment, marriage or in search of virgin land for farming. Such movements bring lots of anxieties.

The first reading (Gen. 12:1-4), highlights how Abram may have experienced such anxieties when he was called by God to abandon his fatherland, kinsmen and the homeliness of his environment for an unknown destination and mission. On God's promise he quickly left all those things and followed the voice of God for a journey to an unknown land. In that unknown land he would begin a new way of life. In his decision to obey the voice of God even when he did not understand the will of God, we see a manifestation of his unwavering faith in God. And on His part God kept his promise.

This story of Abram represents the journey of faith of each and every believer; a journey from the known to the unknown. Even when we talk about conversion it is still more or less the journey from the known to the unknown. As one who is to undergo a *metanoia* often dreads the idea of finding an alternative to what he/she was used to do. Trust is required. Faith is a journey, not an aimless one. But one with reason. In the case of Abram, God initiates the journey because he had a reason and plan for him. Abram listened and obeyed.

The Gospel highlights a revelation. Revelation is about who God is. The transfiguration is confirms who God is and who Jesus is. In front of the disciples (Peter, James and John), the glory of God is manifested and Jesus' Sonship is revealed. The disciples of Jesus experienced an "epiphany" - the manifestation of the glory of God. Transfiguration is also an encouragement to trust God and to listen to him.

Listening to Jesus is a very significant component of the Lenten observance. As individuals, families and communities we are called to imitate Abram and the disciples who listened faithfully to the sacred word. This listening entails trusting God. Those who remain faithful to his Word shall have a place in God's glory. At the same time, Jesus does not pretend that it will be easy. In the preceding chapter, Jesus announces that he must suffer and Peter opposes him. Even at the transfiguration, he calls his disciples not to relax in the glory they had experienced, but to still go down and confront the situations.

In various ways we meet challenges as individuals, families and communities. Some of the challenges are so big that they can affect our faith. Living in a world where there are so many voices we can miss the voice of the Lord and lose our trust in God. It is the voice of Jesus that we are called to listen to when dealing with our challenges. Sometimes we are expected to stand up against the current. He is calling us to abandon our comfort zones and those things we are attached to, to embrace a new way of living. It is a call to imitate Abraham. He wants us to detach from inferior realities that we may be attached to superior realities.

Beloved brethren, though there may be lots of temptations and distractions on this journey, we are called to remain focused. The transfiguration narrative should "enlighten our vision, strengthen our courage, solidify our faith and increase our hope." With hope that there is victory at the end of our battle against evil, St Paul in the second reading (2 Timothy 1:8-10), advises us to accept in good faith the hardship that the gospel entails. Our journey of faith would expose us to several difficulties but the joy is that Jesus has won for us an everlasting life which we shall inherit at the end of our journey.

The journey of faith may also mean walking away from the "business as usual" to new ways of doing things. It is the movement away from the unfair dealings with one another to justice. From manipulation and cheating to honesty. Movement from poor working conditions of services for the workers to improved conditions. It is a change from going by the masses to standing up against wrong popular practices and habits.

Abraham made a journey and became a blessing to the nations. This obedience to listen and move where God leads us, makes us become a blessing to many. May we always trust Him and obey his instructions. Through the Good News we have shared together, may God grant us the grace to remain focused on our journey especially within and beyond this Lenten season.