

Homily of Fifth Sunday of Lent, Year A, 2026

Ezekiel 37:12-14; Psalm 130:1-8; Romans 8:8-11; John 11:1-45

Next Sunday is Palm Sunday. How is your Lenten journey going? Have you fulfilled the Lenten obligations of Repentance (Confession), Almsgiving (works of charity), Fasting and Abstinence, and Prayer?

The first reading was Ezekiel's prophecy to the people of Israel while they were in exile in Babylon. They had resigned to hopelessness that they would never be free and would never return to their homeland. Through Ezekiel, God gave hope to them. Ezekiel prophesied, "I will open your graves and have you rise from them... I will put my spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you upon your land..." Ezekiel prophesied spirit, life, and restoration in place of death and grave.

This prophecy was fulfilled in about 597 BC when King Cyrus of Persia released the people of Israel to return to their land. They did not fight for their freedom. An additional blessing they received was that they left Babylon with so much gold and silver (5,400 articles of gold and silver) to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Following the King's decree, the Babylonians provided the Israelites with silver and gold, goods and livestock, and freewill offerings for the temple (Ezra 1:1-11). Although the Israelites never believed that there was hope for them to return to their homeland, but when it was God's time, it came very fast and with unexpected blessings.

In the gospel, Lazarus was dead and was in the grave for four days. Jesus brought him back to life. It was a hopeless case before Jesus arrived. When Jesus was told that Lazarus was ill, he did not proceed immediately to visit Lazarus. It took him four days before he arrived. Jesus ordered that the stone be taken away and ordered Lazarus to come out. Lazarus came out with hand and foot tied with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. Jesus ordered, "Untie him and let him go." Jesus is the one who commands "prisoners: come out" and "those in darkness: Show yourselves," as prophesied in Isaiah 49:9. But we are the ones who obey or disobey.

After seventy years in captivity, the Israelites got their freedom. After four days in the grave, Lazarus came back to life. This means that, sometimes, challenging times can last for a long time. Since we do not know God's divine will, we are encouraged to stand strong in faith and persevere in prayer. Jesus promises in Matthew 24:13, "The one who perseveres to the end will be saved."

The Israelites never believed that they would return to their homeland. Nobody could have imagined that Lazarus would live again having been buried for four days. "With God, all things are possible" (Matthew 19:6). God promises, "I will open your graves and have you rise from them ... I have promised and, I will do it" (Ezekiel 37:14). "I will never forget you" (Isaiah 49:15).

In the gospel of last Sunday, Jesus was asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him" (John 9:3). Today, we read, "Master, the one you love is ill.' When Jesus heard this, he said, "This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the son of God may be glorified through it" (John 11:4). We pray that the works of God be made visible and God be glorified through our unpleasant situations. St. Paul writes, "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). Jesus says to us what he said to Martha, "Did I not tell that if you believe you will see the glory of God?"

The Israelites were under the yoke of slavery in Babylon. We may have our own yokes enslaving us. May God free us from our yokes. Lazarus was dead and, in the grave, covered by a stone. He was bound hand and foot, and his face wrapped in a cloth. We may be feeling like being in the grave. We may be feeling like we are weighed down by a large stone. We may be feeling like tied by hand and foot. We may be feeling like our face is wrapped in a cloth. May Jesus weep over our situations as he wept over Lazarus' death, and free us from our affliction as he freed Lazarus from death. We express our faith in Jesus as Martha did, "But even now [we] know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you."

We pray with St. Paul, (in the second reading): May the Spirit of the One who raised Christ from the dead give life to our mortal bodies. May the Spirit of the One who raised Christ from the dead break our yokes, remove the stones weighing upon us, raise us up from our graves, untie our bands, and set us free. Amen.

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