

## Fifth Sunday of Lent 2020

**The Readings:** <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/032920.cfm>

Welcome to the Fifth Sunday of Lent. This Lent has taken on a whole new level of meaning hasn't it? This is a Lent that we will never forget. And I think that is because, deep in our hearts, we know the Lord is taking us on a remarkable journey. And we don't know what is going to happen or where he is taking us. But...that's how the Lord works.

I think we might have to admit that this Lent, and this experience with the Coronavirus, this "hunkering down" in our homes, feels a little bit like a loss. Yet we can't quite put our finger on exactly what that is. Yes, it's the obvious of course, loss of normal daily routines, the Holy Mass and the Eucharist, for sure. And for some, this might even feel like a death of sorts.

Fr. Augustine Wetta, a Benedictine monk, who lives at Saint Louis Abbey recounts this story of a few years ago. One morning, Fr. Augustine peaked into the cell (room) of Fr. Luke, a beloved, elderly monk who founded St. Louis Abbey.

He found Fr. Luke gazing out his window in deep meditation, looking down at the abbey graveyard. Turns out that in just a few months he would be buried there. He was roused from his prayer and greeted Fr. Augustine with a joyful "good morning". When Fr. Augustine asked his former novice master how he was doing, Fr. Luke responded, "well you know...I'm just wait'n to die."

Concerned, Fr. Augustine asked if he was OK, and Fr. Luke responded, “Well, I’m as happy as anyone could expect...but, you know, you gotta have something to look forward to”.

Reflecting later on this intriguing exchange, Fr. Augustine realized that what Fr. Luke really meant was that, “there’s really no other way to get to heaven”. So true, and yet not many of us meditate on our death like old Fr. Luke.

Fr. Luke understood very well that resurrection follows death and resurrection brings us to heaven, and face to face with Jesus. He was focused on what really matters. He believed with every ounce of his being the words of Jesus to Martha in today’s Gospel, “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die”.

Whoever follows Jesus, whoever trusts Jesus, does not await the end of earthly life in panic. We don’t fall through the gates of death into the abyss of nothingness; rather, we enter into full, complete life.

All three of our readings for this 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent deal with resurrection. Even our Responsorial Psalm cries out, *even more than sentinels wait for the dawn, so we wait for the Lord.*

The first reading from the prophet Ezekiel is a small excerpt from a longer section sub-titled, *The Dry Bones*. Ezekiel is carried away by the spirit to a valley filled with bones and is made to walk among the dry bones. And God

asks Ezekiel, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And God commands Ezekiel to prophesy over the bones and to say, "Dry bones, hear the word of God." And then God tells the bones that breath will enter them, and sinews and flesh will grow on them.

And indeed, Ezekiel watched as the bones started to clatter and join together along with muscle and flesh and then God made breath enter them. And they came to life again, a great immense army.

*"Then you shall know that I am the LORD,  
when I open your graves, and have you rise from them..."*

In the second reading from St. Paul's letter to the Romans, Paul writes of Jesus's resurrection and gives assurances of our own, "If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit dwelling in you". The resurrection of the Christian is thus patterned after the resurrection of Christ himself.

And finally, John's Gospel tells of the death of Jesus's friend Lazarus. Lazarus too ends up in a grave; interestingly enough, a cave; with a large stone placed at the opening. That's how Jesus's tomb is described isn't it? This Gospel is looking ahead to Jesus's own death and resurrection.

And so that we can trust that our faith in Jesus really does give life, Jesus calls his friend Lazarus out of the tomb. Jesus shows his power over death by the resurrection of Lazarus. Back in our first reading we have already

been given a strong message about the power of God over death: “Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and have you rise from them...”

When Jesus heard that Lazarus was ill, “he remained for 2 days in the place where he was”. Why does Jesus delay in going to see his ill friend? By the time Jesus shows up in Bethany, Lazarus has been dead for 4 days. Some people lose their faith and trust in God, when despite all of their prayers, a loved one dies anyway.

So often we would like our Lord to do things in our way. We must always remember, however, to leave him to do them in his own way, the way of perfection, his way of perfect love. Even Martha greets Jesus with a tinge of reproach, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died”. But she then immediately follows up with words of great faith, “But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.”

God’s purpose is seen even in his delay. His delays are mysterious. He may abstain for the moment from healing, not because he doesn’t love us, but because he never stops loving, and a greater good is to come from the waiting.

This time of being confined to our homes is a great gift, a great spiritual opportunity, a rare opportunity. Bishop Robert Barron calls it “imposed monasticism”. In one of his recent video reflections, he quotes Blaise Pascal, a Catholic Theologian and scientist who said, “All of humanity’s problems stem from man’s inability to sit quietly in a room alone.”

The Bishop goes on to suggest that perhaps we could all think of this time of semi-quarantine as an invitation to some monastic introspection, some serious confrontation with the questions that matter—some purposeful sitting alone in a room. Don't waste this time. Use it to prepare for heaven.

But Satan is trying desperately to divert and distract us from what really matters. His goals for us are despair, hopelessness and emptiness.

He doesn't want us to take this time to grow closer to our Lord, to read the Bible more, to pray the rosary more, or to participate in online Masses, or Stations of the Cross, or Bishop Barron's YouTube reflections, or spending undistracted time with our spouse and children. No, he wants us to obsess on the news, to worry, to be anxious, to feel confusion, to escape into mindless TV shows, violent movies, or alcohol. ANYTHING to keep us distracted and diverted from what really matters - strengthening our faith and fixing our eyes on heaven!

By his resurrection, Christ awakens in us a longing for the world to come. Like old Fr. Luke gazing out his window to the place where he would soon be buried, it is to Jesus Christ we know that we are journeying, not to the sunset, but to the sunrise. When we can be absolutely sure of our Lord's love for us, the fear of death vanishes. We are not on our way to death, but on our way to life.

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Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church

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