

*ctkAlive!* Scripture Study  
Lent 2020—A Cycle Readings

Session 5—The Raising of Lazarus



*Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!'  
The dead man came out . . . 'Untie him and let him go.' "*  
*John 11:45*

**Opening Prayer** (slowly . . . follow the pause marks ( / // ).

**Leader** In prayer, we seek the light of Christ as the source and goal of our sharing.

**All** Father, / let your wisdom enlighten our discussion / and lead us to faith  
as strong as that of Martha and Mary, / the sisters of Lazarus.

**Leader** Your son, Jesus, / raised his dear friend from the dead.

**All** Every day you breathe life into us.

**Leader** Be with us now / as we gather to share our lives with one another. //  
We ask this in the name of our compassionate Savior.

**All:** Amen.

**General Commentary on the Scriptures of the First Week of Lent, Cycle A**  
(Leader)

Grief over the loss of a loved one or dear friend is among the rawest of human emotions. Yet, through faith like that of Mary and Martha, we too can survive our shock and sorrow after losing a loved one. And not only survive but grow in wisdom and grace. The key is trusting God to show us how to create a new heart in us, a new

way of living and loving and to give us and the grace and courage to say YES to God's invitation to renew ourselves and find out—again—who we really are.

This might be a good time to be mindful of someone who honored my tears and soothed my aching heart or held my broken heart in their healing hands.

Here's another way of saying this. Let's recall someone who came to us in the role of the comforting Christ during our time of grieving. What did they do to give comfort and renew our faith that "life *does* go on" after a painful loss. Offer a prayer for that person.

Let's also think of a time when we played the role of consoler/comforter to someone grieving the loss of a loved one. How were our condolences received? How easy or difficult was it to be the comforter. How do we respond when someone offers us their love and prayers in our own time of sorrow.

Beginning with this session, we will highlight the *most forgotten* (least appreciated) reading in the liturgy of the Word . . . the antiphonal psalm (often chanted by a cantor with a refrain sung by the community. This week's antiphon is **Psalm 130**, the familiar *De profundis*, "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Yahweh. . . ."

### **First Reading**

From the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel (Chapter 37, Verses 12 – 14)

"So prophesy! Say to them: This is what Yahweh says: 'I am going to open your tombs, I shall bring you out of your tombs, my people, and lead you back to the land of Israel. You will know that I am Yahweh, O my people, when I open your graves and bring you out of your graves, when I put my spirit in you and you live. I shall settle you in your land and you will know that I, Yahweh, have done what I said I would do.' "

### Personal Reflection

Ezekiel and his fellow Israelites, experienced the living death of captivity and exile in Babylon (598 B.C.E.). Yet, the prophet kept his faith and hope alive, and encouraged others to do the same.

— *What experience in my lifetime might I describe as a "living death" (not someone's actual demise)? What kept me spiritually and emotionally "alive" and moving forward during that period?*

— *How well do I respond to others who try to comfort me, when I am in the throes of sorrow? (Be honest!)*

— *How have I experienced restoration? Have I ever experienced a radical loss in my*

*life that altered the way I experience life. A list of real-life, radical losses might be helpful here: end of close relationship, loss of a job, loss of a place to live, loss of a treasured possession, wealth, health, reputation, familiar home base, e.g. job transfer.*

## **Antiphon**

Liturgists have chosen the antiphonal psalm to accompany the Mass readings. That psalm is in harmony with the overall theme of rising from death to life, whether physically or spiritually.

PSALM 130 (129) \*

*A prayer of repentance and trust*

The psalmists consistently use the masculine pronoun when referring to Yahweh/God. It is only since the Second Vatican council (1962-1965) that biblical scholars and liturgists have begun to follow the shift in societal custom to use “gender neutral” or “gender inclusive” language. We have chosen to keep the original gender usage in the psalm for Yahweh, simply to maintain the poetic flow of the language.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Yahweh,  
O Yahweh, hear my voice!  
Let your ears pay attention to the voice of my supplication.  
If you should mark our evil, O Yahweh, who could stand?  
But with you, is forgiveness, and for that, you are revered.  
I waited for Yahweh, my soul waits; and I put my hope in his word.  
My soul expects Yahweh more than watchmen, the dawn.  
O Israel, hope in Yahweh, for with him,  
is unfailing love and with him full deliverance.  
He will deliver Israel from all its sins.

## Personal Reflection

— *When was the last time I prayed from the “depths” of my spirit (de profundis)?  
Was it from the depths of sorrow or joy?*

## **Second Reading**

From the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans, Chapter 8, Verses 8 – 11

Those walking according to the flesh cannot please God. Yet, *your* existence is not in the flesh, but in the spirit, because the Spirit of God is within you. If you did not have the Spirit of Christ, you would not belong to him. But Christ is within you. Though the body is branded by death as a consequence of sin, the spirit is life and holiness. And, if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is within you, He who raised Jesus Christ from among the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies. Yes, *he will do it*, through his Spirit, who dwells within you.

### Personal Reflection

St. Paul confirms our hope that our God keeps all promises made to us.

— *In my own life, how have I experienced God, as a keeper of promises?*

— *How hard is it for me to trust God in tough times?*

— *What do I believe and imagine about the promised resurrection of my own body?*

### **A reading from the Gospel of St. John (11:1 – 45)**

#### *The raising of Lazarus*

There was a sick man named Lazarus who was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was the same Mary who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair. Her brother Lazarus was sick.

So the sisters sent this message to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

On hearing this Jesus said, “This illness will not end in death; rather it is for God’s glory and the Son of God will be glorified through it.”

It is a fact that Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus; yet, after he heard of the illness of Lazarus, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Only then did he say to his disciples, “Let us go into Judea again.”

They replied, “Master, recently the Jews wanted to stone you. Are you going there again?”

Jesus said to them, “Are not twelve working hours needed to complete a day? Those who walk in the daytime shall not stumble, for they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, for there is no light in them.”

After that Jesus said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going to wake him.”

The disciples replied, “Lord, a sick person who sleeps will recover.”

But Jesus had referred to Lazarus’ death, while they thought that he had meant the repose of sleep. So Jesus said plainly, “Lazarus is dead and for your sake I am glad I was not there, for now you may believe. But let us go there, where he is.”

Then Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go that we may die with him.”

When Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. As Bethany is near Jerusalem, about two miles away, many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to offer consolation at their brother's death.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him while Mary remained sitting in the house. And she said to Jesus, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."

Jesus said, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha replied, "I know that he will rise in the resurrection, at the last day."

But Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection; whoever believes in me, though he die, shall live. Whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Martha then answered, "Yes, Lord, I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world."

After that, Martha went and called her sister Mary secretly, saying, "The Master is here and is calling for you."

As soon as Mary heard this, she rose and went to him. Jesus had not yet come into the village but was still in the place where Martha had met him.

The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her, also came. When they saw her get up and go out, they followed her, thinking that she was going to the tomb to weep.

As for Mary, when she came to 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 also who had come with her, he was moved in the depths of his spirit and troubled. Then he asked, "Where have you laid him?"

They answered, "Lord, come and see."

And Jesus wept.

The Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "If he could open the eyes of the blind man, could he not have kept this man from dying?"

Jesus was deeply moved again and drew near to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across it. Jesus ordered, "Take the stone away."

Martha said to him, "Lord, by now he will smell, for this is the fourth day."

Jesus replied, "Have I not told you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" So, they removed the stone. Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you for you have heard me. I knew that you hear me always; but my prayer was for the sake of these people, that they may believe that you sent me." When Jesus had said this, he cried out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips and his face wrapped in a cloth.

Jesus said to them, "Untie him and let him go."

## Personal Reflection

Reflecting on the Gospel for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent, we can only guess what Lazarus might have said to Jesus, after being awakened (raised) and freed from his binding cloths.

— Who or what am I grieving during this Lent? How am I coping with this raw emotion?

— What would I like my first words to be, when the Lord greets me on the *other* side of death?

— What is going on in my life today whose outcome I cannot foresee (the current worldwide threat; my own personal illness; a son or daughter whose life is off-track; loss of a job; financial problems, etc.)? What words of Jesus give me reason to hope for a beneficial outcome?

— Among the “actors” in this dramatic but true life-moment, with whom do I identify most closely? Lazarus? Martha? Mary? Their neighbors? Or even Jesus himself, who wept openly at his friend’s tomb?

## **Journaling**

Spend some time writing about your personal experience(s) of loss/grief.

— *Who was my human “good shepherd” at that time?*

— *How have I been able to express my gratitude for that person’s gift?*

## **Questions** (Leader)

I welcome your questions and/or comments about this session. Send them to [alfredjgarrotto@gmail.com](mailto:alfredjgarrotto@gmail.com)

## **Preview of Next Session**

Isaiah 50:4-7 (“The Lord God is my help.”)

Antiphon: Psalm 22 (“*All who see me scoff at me; they mock me with parted lips, they wag their heads: ‘He relied on the LORD; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, if he loves him.’*”)

Philippians 2:6-11 (“*Jesus Christ is Lord.*”)

Matthew 21:1-11 (“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”)

**Recommended Reading:**

*God’s Tender Mercy: Reflections on Forgiveness* by Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB  
(Sr. Joan needs no introduction. She is one of America’s leading spiritual writers and speakers. For senior citizens, we highly recommend her book on aging, *The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully.*)

*Under the Influence of Jesus: The Transforming Experience of Encountering Christ* by Joe Paprocki  
(The author is a national consultant for Loyola Press and has spent over 30 years in Catholic lay ministry. He has authored many books on aspects of living the Christian life in the modern world.)

**Closing Prayer**

**“A Lazarus Prayer”**

(Adapted version of “A Litany for Lent” by *St. Francis of Assisi*)

**Leader** Let’s offer to God our own prayer intentions and petitions. // Let’s not forget our parish’s RCIA catechumens and candidates, / and all new Catholics-to-be, / throughout the Catholic world.

**All** Life came to the tomb of Lazarus, / when Jesus, / who called himself the resurrection and the life, / raised him from the dead.

**Leader** Lord Jesus, / you invite us to be your friends, / like Martha, / Mary, / and Lazarus. // Stay in our company. // Share what little we have. //

**All** Come to our aid, when we are in need. // Compassionate Jesus, / you wept for your dear friend, Lazarus. // So great was your love for him / that you opened his tomb / and snatched him from the clutches of death.

**Leader** We believe that you weep at every death, / and will weep at ours, / in the tears of those we leave behind. // When that day arrives, / take us into your loving arms / and lead us home. //

**All** Amen.

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**\* Why do some psalms have a number, then another number in parentheses?**

“The explanation is that there are different ways of numbering the Psalms, and different Bible (and other documents) follow different numbering system. One numbering system is that used by the Hebrew Masoretic text. This is the version used by most modern Bible translations. Another is that used by the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. This version was inherited by the Vulgate and thus by the Douay-Rheims. Because both numbering systems are in circulation, Catholic sources often use both systems, which is why you’ll see references like ‘Ps 23[22]:1’ (or ‘Ps 22[23]:1,’ depending on which numbering system they’re treating as primary).”

— Jimmy Akin

Source: <https://jimmyakin.com/2012/06/why-are-the-psalms-numbered-differently.html>

*Jimmy Akin was born in Texas and grew up nominally Protestant. But at age 20 he experienced a profound conversion to Christ. He planned on becoming a Protestant pastor or seminary professor and started an intensive study of the Bible. The more he immersed himself in Scripture, the more he found it to support the Catholic faith. Eventually, he became a Catholic (1992). His conversion story, “A Triumph and a Tragedy,” is published in the book Surprised by Truth. He is now a Senior Apologist at “Catholic Answers.”*

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