

Readings: Ez 37:12-14; Ps 130:1-8; Rom 8:8-11; Jn 11:1-45
The raising of Lazarus from the dead shows us that Jesus can save us,
both in this life and for the life to come.

Summary: Today's readings show us that Jesus has the power to save us from ourselves and even from death if we are faithful to him. This salvation is both for this world and for the world to come.

Special lessons from these readings:

1. **How to die and how to do funerals.** Normally, in Palestine, because of the climate, burial followed death as quickly as possible. There was a time when a funeral was an exceedingly costly thing. The finest spices and ointments were used to anoint the body; the body itself was clothed in the most magnificent robes; all kinds of valuables were buried in the tomb with the body. By midway through the first century this had become a ruinous expenditure. Naturally no one wished on such an occasion to be outdone by his neighbor and the funeral expenses became ever more expensive. This had become an almost intolerable burden until the advent of a famous Rabbi called Gamaliel the Second. He gave orders that he was to be buried in the simplest possible linen robe, and so broke the extravagance of funeral customs. To this day at Jewish funerals a cup is drunk to Rabbi Gamaliel who rescued the Jews from their own ostentatious extravagance.

Example of John Paul II: In our time when medical care approaching death can be a similar burden, the Holy Father, John Paul II has likewise given us a good example. When he was dying, he finally said that he would not go back to the hospital again. He stayed in his room until he died. Is this not a good example for us? Why be excessively anxious about death?
Options – frantic desperation, quiet hopeless stoicism, peaceful Christian assurance.

2. **Progressive revelation concerning the afterworld.** Most of the saints of the Old Testament died having no real belief in any real life after death. In the early days, the Hebrews believed that the soul of every man, good and bad alike, went to Sheol. Sheol is not "Hell"; for it was not a place of torture, it was the land of the shades. All alike went there and they lived a vague, shadowy, strengthless, joyless, ghostly kind of life. By the time of Jesus most Jews believed in some form of resurrection to eternal life. Only the Sadducees still refused to believe in any life after death. We know that at the time of death our soul separates from our body and goes before Jesus for the "particular judgment". Each of us will receive our eternal retribution in our immortal soul at the very moment of death. This will be either entrance into the blessedness of heaven, through a purification or immediately, or immediate and everlasting damnation" (CCC 1021-1022) For "The Four Last Things see CCC 1020-1060.
3. **The Seven Signs of Jesus in the Gospel of John.** The Gospel of John is divided into two primary parts: the Book of Signs (the public ministry of Jesus, chpt 1-12) and the Book of Glory (the Last Supper, the Passion, and the Resurrection). The seven signs are generally considered to be:
 - 1) Changing water into wine at Cana (2:1-11),
 - 2) Curing the royal official's son at Cana (4:46-54).
 - 3) Curing the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-15).
 - 4) Multiplication of the loaves in Galilee (6:1-15).
 - 5) Walking upon the Sea of Galilee (6:16-21).
 - 6) Curing a blind man in Jerusalem (9).
 - 7) Raising Lazarus from the dead at Bethany (11).

Concerning the readings:

1. **The Gospel** – The raising of Lazarus is the final and greatest sign of Jesus, the Deliverer, a symbolic narrative of his victory over death at the cost of his own life and a sign anticipating his resurrection. Describing this great miracle, the Church assures us that we, too, will be raised into

eternal life after our battle with sin and death in this world. Thus *resurrection hope* is the central theme of the Scripture readings for the fifth Sunday of Lent.

2. 5. The Fathers of the Church had different levels of interpreting Scripture. There is the literal. What is said literally, actually happened. But there is also a “moral” level of interpretation and a “final salvation” way of interpretation. In the first reading Israel had been defeated and was “dead” in their sins. In the Gospel we find that Lazarus dead in the tomb is analogous to us dead in our sins (Eph 2:1, Col 2:13). We often bind ourselves with chains of addiction to alcohol, drugs, sexual deviations and promiscuity, slander, gossip, envy, prejudices, hatred and uncontrollable anger and bury ourselves in the tombs of despair. Sometimes we are in the tomb of selfishness, filled with negative feelings such as worry, fear, resentment, hatred, and guilt. Are there times when we refuse to let the generosity of God enter into our wallets, our world of material possessions, fearful that faithful tithing or generosity toward the need and poor might endanger our savings, or our retirement? Reflect! What might be the way that you, your family or your friends might be “dead in your sins?”
- 3.
4. 6. If we want Jesus to visit our dark dungeons of sin, despair and unhappiness, let us ask Jesus during this Holy Mass to bring the light and the power of His Holy Spirit into our private life and liberate us from our tombs.
5. Pope Francis is especially calling us to a year of mercy and compassion. But he is also clear that God is not just accepting or tolerating everything. That God is offering His mercy means that we have fallen short in sin. The prevailing attitude in our culture is different. It is that I should be accepted for what I am. It is an extension of “I’m O.K., You’re O.K. That is not a Christian understanding. We come before God as sinners needing to repent and to be forgiven. We need to do our part to assist in that conversion. That involves a merciful mutual judgment and correction and then acceptance as repentant sinners. Therefore let us focus on mutual correction and repentance, so that we can really be forgiving and repenting, thereby preparing ourselves for God’s judgment.

Themes of Lent A

1. Temptation in the desert – preparation and training for spiritual warfare and discipleship.
 2. Transfiguration of Jesus – identification of Jesus as Messiah and fulfillment of the O.T.
 3. Woman at the well – the thirst for the living water of eternal life, Jesus as Messiah.
 4. Healing of the man born blind – healing of spiritual blindness, ability to see Jesus.
 5. Resurrection of Lazarus – promise of Jesus’s power over death and our salvation.
 6. Palm (Passion) Sunday.
6. **Old Testament** – The promise of new life to the Jews in Exile also shows us that the saving power of God is not just for the end of life (salvation to eternal life) but that God also works in history to heal and restore. “Roll away the stone, unbind him and let him go.” We often bind ourselves with chains of addiction to alcohol, drugs, sexual deviations, slander, gossip, envy, prejudices, hatred and uncontrollable anger and bury ourselves in the tombs of despair. Sometimes we are in the tomb of selfishness, filled with negative feelings such as worry, fear, resentment, hatred, and guilt. Are there times when we refuse to let the generosity of God enter into our wallets, our world of material possessions, fearful that faithful tithing will endanger our savings, or our retirement? If we want Jesus to visit our dark dungeons of sin, despair and unhappiness, let us ask Jesus during this Holy Mass to bring the light and the power of His Holy Spirit into our private life and liberate us from our tombs.
 7. **Epistle:** Here St Paul assures the early Roman Christians who were facing death by persecution, and us who are surrounded by a culture of death and too easily caught up in our own sins, that the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead and who dwells within us will give life to our mortal

bodies. He considers the resurrection of Jesus, and the subsequent gift of the Holy Spirit as the basis for our hope of sharing in Jesus' resurrection.

Context: See the context for this passage in Romans 8. Just immediately before, Romans 7:13-25, St. Paul was sharing his struggles in this life against sin. He says, "I see in my members another principle at war with the law of my mind, taking me captive to the saw of sin that swells in my members. Miserable man that I am! Who will deliver me from this mortal body?"

The answer is to live in the Spirit and not in the flesh. "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." There is great power in faith in Jesus Christ and in living in the Spirit.

What a glorious and happy existence to be "in Christ" and "living in the Spirit." We are happy and content with ourselves without needing alcohol, drugs or other forms of self-indulgence. We are not caught up in guilt. We are making progress against bad habits and finding good habits growing within us. To make this possible is the meaning of our ministry here (and in the world).

No fear of death: We are also free to live our lives generously and not be overly concerned with our own death. How beautiful living the resurrection life now and in the future!!!

Application: 1. As we consider the promise of new life in Christ Jesus, what is my project or my resolution emanating from this Mass what would help me at this time to become the "better-version-of-myself" that God wants and makes possible? What is the next step that I need to work on?

2. What part or parts of my life do I need to submit to the power of the Holy Spirit, asking Jesus to come into my heart to give me victory in the war against sin and death?

3. What is the next step that God wants me to take in order to become the active servant in mission that he wants of me? What could be possible for me to do in this life to make a difference in the lives of others?