

# Sunday Message

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

THE WORD

Year A • 26 March 2023 • Psalter Week 1



Today's Gospel is the famous story of the restoration of Lazarus to life. Lazarus, a friend of Jesus, is ill. His sisters ask Jesus to come to see him. But Jesus delays a while. By the time he finally arrives, Lazarus has already been in the tomb for four days.

Jesus gathers Martha, Mary, his disciples, and some friends who had come to console the grieving sisters, around Lazarus' tomb. He works a sign to show that he is the "resurrection and the life." He asks that the stone sealing the tomb be removed. Then he prays and bids Lazarus to come out. Still in his burial clothes, Lazarus comes out; he has been restored to life. Then Jesus orders them: "Unbind him. Set him free." And they do. And he is.

Lazarus is unbound; freed from the bonds of death and all that was binding him up; he can now get on with living. Thanks to the power of Jesus.

Today's Gospel encourages us to think about what might be binding us up, keeping us from being fully alive, keeping us from being set free.

There are so many ways we can feel bound up and unfree.

We can be bound up in a sense of our own sinfulness, thinking that we are not good enough before God. Some people suffer from terrible scruples about the most insignificant transgressions.

We can be bound up in an addiction of some kind – to drink, drugs, porn, gambling – from which there can seem to be no escape.

We can be bound up in poor self-esteem, thinking we don't measure up, wrapped up in a sense of our own unworthiness, full of self-pity and quiet despair.

We can be bound up in a terrible anger – at someone close to us, at the Church, at God, maybe at ourselves and our circumstances – that eats away at us.

We can be bound up in a dead routine – doing the same things day after day, feeling trapped, unfulfilled, and stifled.

Lent is a season that invites us to look at what binds us up. It is an invitation to look at what keeps us from being fully ourselves, fully alive, fully authentic, the kind of people God wants us to be – and to invite God in.

Jesus is the Lord of life. He wants to free us from all that burdens us. He wants to unbind us from all that prevents us from being our best selves, as he unbound Lazarus and set him free. ■

## REFLECT

One way of being unbound, set free, is by going to confession. It is something we could consider this Lent. Having someone we can confide in is important too – a partner, friend, counsellor. And our God is one in whom we can confide, at any time, and free of charge. Talking, confessing, and letting things out is a wonderful way to unburden.

Jesus is our great liberator. He is the resurrection and the life. He sets us free. He frees us even from the chains of death itself. All we need to do is to turn to him. ■



## LEARN

Our God is a God of life – not of death

The Christian believes in the resurrection of the dead. This is at the core of our faith

The Christian is opposed to anything that is not life-giving

## DO

Examine your life. How deeply do you value the gift of life you have received? What bad habits or practices might you need to change?

## SAY

Repeat the words of Martha from today's Gospel: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into this world."

## PRAY

Pray for your deceased loved ones and the deceased members of this local community. Give thanks for their lives. Ask the Lord of life to take them to himself.



**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

Give me justice, O God,  
and plead my cause against a nation that is  
faithless.

From the deceitful and cunning rescue me,  
for you, O God, are my strength.

**COLLECT**

By your help, we beseech you, Lord our God,  
may we walk eagerly in that same charity  
with which, out of love for the world,  
your Son handed himself over to death.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of  
the Holy Spirit,  
God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

**FIRST READING**

Ezekiel 37:12-14

A reading from the prophet Ezekiel.

The Lord says this: "I am now going to open  
your graves; I mean to raise you from your  
graves, my people, and lead you back to the  
soil of Israel. And you will know that I am the  
Lord, when I open your graves and raise you  
from your graves, my people. And I shall put  
my spirit in you, and you will live, and I shall  
resettle you on your own soil; and you will  
know that I, the Lord, have said and done this  
– it is the Lord who speaks."

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

**PSALM**

Psalm 129

Response:

**With the Lord there is mercy  
and fullness of redemption.**

1. Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord,  
Lord, hear my voice!  
O let your ears be attentive  
to the voice of my pleading. (R.)
2. If you, O Lord, should mark our guilt,  
Lord, who would survive?  
But with you is found forgiveness:  
for this we revere you. (R.)
3. My soul is waiting for the Lord,  
I count on his word.  
My soul is longing for the Lord  
more than watchman for daybreak.  
(Let the watchman count on daybreak  
and Israel on the Lord.) (R.)
4. Because with the Lord there is mercy  
and fullness of redemption,  
Israel indeed he will redeem  
from all its iniquity. (R.)

**SECOND READING**

Romans 8:8-11

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the  
Romans.

People who are interested only in unspiritual  
things can never be pleasing to God. Your  
interests, however, are not in the unspiritual,  
but in the spiritual, since the Spirit of God  
has made his home in you. In fact, unless you  
possessed the Spirit of Christ you would not  
belong to him. Though your body may be  
dead it is because of sin, but if Christ is in you  
then your spirit is life itself because you have  
been justified; and if the Spirit of him who  
raised Jesus from the dead is living in you,  
then he who raised Jesus from the dead will  
give life to your own mortal bodies through  
his Spirit living in you.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Glory and praise to you, O Christ!  
I am the resurrection and the life, says the  
Lord;  
whoever believes in me will never die.  
Glory and praise to you, O Christ!

**GOSPEL**

John 11:1-45

(For shorter form read between >> )

A reading from the holy Gospel according to  
John.

There was a man named Lazarus who lived  
in the village of Bethany with his two sisters,  
Mary and Martha, and he was ill. It was the  
same Mary, the sister of the sick man Lazarus,  
who anointed the Lord with ointment and  
wiped his feet with her hair. >The sisters sent  
this message to Jesus, "Lord, the man you  
love is ill." On receiving the message, Jesus  
said, "This sickness will end, not in death but  
in God's glory, and through it the Son of God  
will be glorified." Jesus loved Martha and her  
sister and Lazarus; yet when he heard that  
Lazarus was ill he stayed where he was for two  
more days before saying to the disciples, "Let  
us go to Judaea." < The disciples said, "Rabbi,  
it is not long since the Jews wanted to stone  
you; are you going back again?" Jesus replied;  
"Are there not twelve hours in the day?

A man can walk in the daytime without  
stumbling  
because he has the light of this world to see by;  
but if he walks at night he stumbles,  
because there is no light to guide him."

He said that and then added, "Our friend  
Lazarus is resting, I am going to wake him."  
The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he is able  
to rest he is sure to get better." The phrase  
Jesus used referred to the death of Lazarus,  
but they thought that by "rest" he meant  
"sleep," so Jesus put it plainly, "Lazarus is  
dead; and for your sake I am glad I was not  
there because now you will believe. But let  
us go to him." Then Thomas – known as the  
Twin – said to the other disciples, "Let us go  
too, and die with him." >On arriving, Jesus  
found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for  
four days already.<Bethany is only about two  
miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had  
come to Martha and Mary to sympathise with  
them over their brother. >When Martha heard  
that Jesus had come she went to meet him.  
Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha  
said to Jesus, "If you had been here, my  
brother would not have died, but I know that,  
even now, whatever you ask of God he will  
grant you." "Your brother" said Jesus to her  
"will rise again." Martha said, "I know he will  
rise again at the resurrection on the last day."  
Jesus said:

"I am the resurrection, and the life.  
If anyone believes in me, even though he dies  
he will live,  
and whoever lives and believes in me  
will never die.  
Do you believe this?"

"Yes, Lord," she said "I believe that you are  
the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was  
to come into this world." < When she had  
said this, she went and called her sister Mary,  
saying in a low voice, "The Master is here  
and wants to see you." Hearing this, Mary got  
up quickly and went to him. Jesus had not  
yet come into the village; he was still at the  
place where Martha had met him. When the  
Jews who were in the house sympathising  
with Mary saw her get up so quickly and go  
out, they followed her, thinking that she was  
going to the tomb to weep there. Mary went

to Jesus, and as soon as she saw him she  
threw herself at his feet, saying, "Lord, if you  
had been here, my brother would not have  
died." At the sight of her tears, and those of  
the Jews who followed her, >Jesus said in  
great distress, with a sigh that came straight  
from the heart, "Where have you put him?"  
They said, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept;  
and the Jews said, "See how much he loved  
him!" But there were some who remarked,  
"He opened the eyes of the blind man, could  
he not have prevented this man's death?" Still  
sighing, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave  
with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said,  
"Take the stone away." Martha said to him,  
"Lord, by now he will smell; 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 took away the stone. Then Jesus lifted up  
his eyes and said:  
"Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer.  
I knew indeed that you always hear me,  
but I speak  
for the sake of all these who stand around me,  
so that they may believe it was you who sent  
me."

When he had said this, he cried in a loud  
voice, "Lazarus, here! Come out!" The dead  
man came out, his feet and hands bound with  
bands of stuff and a cloth round his face. Jesus  
said to them "Unbind him, let him go free."  
Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary  
and had seen what he did, believed in him.

The Gospel of the Lord. <

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

**PROFESSION OF FAITH**

I believe in God,  
the Father almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth,  
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

(all bow during the next two lines)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
he descended into hell;  
on the third day he rose again from the dead;  
he ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of God the  
Father almighty;  
from there he will come to judge the living  
and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting. Amen.

**PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS**

Hear us, almighty God,  
and, having instilled in your servants  
the teachings of the Christian faith,  
graciously purify them  
by the working of this sacrifice.  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON**

Everyone who lives and believes in me  
will not die for ever, says the Lord.

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

We pray, almighty God,  
that we may always be counted among the  
members of Christ,  
in whose Body and Blood we have  
communion.  
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.  
Amen.