



Fifth Sunday of Lent Greater Than You Expect

Sometimes a prophet says more than he intended. Ezekiel in the first reading is talking about restoring Israel after the Babylonian exile. The Jews saw the Exile as punishment for their sins, especially the sin of relying on false gods or political leaders for their safety. God demonstrates forgiveness by bringing them back to Israel; God also shows them divine power and glory so that they return to the Lord for their protection.

Ezekiel uses the image of the dead rising from their graves (37:12). Jesus came to show us God in a new way and to fulfill the promises of all previous prophecies. Notice how the first reading repeats two phrases: "open your graves" and "know that I am the LORD." Jesus demonstrates that God's promise is much greater than anything Ezekiel expected.

First, the Gospel. When Jesus went to the tomb of Lazarus, he apparently waited till his friend had died. He knew that he was going to raise Lazarus from death to help his disciples believe. So why was he "perturbed and deeply troubled"? It could be that he was disappointed that his friends did not seem to believe that he could raise Lazarus. Notice Jesus became perturbed again when some of the crowd question Jesus' ability to do so (John 11:37-38). Like Ezekiel, the people of Jesus' time did not expect him literally to raise the dead. But God used the prophet's message to prepare for Jesus' message that not only would he rise from the dead, but we will also. And like the friends and relatives of Lazarus, we too may find it hard to believe, or at least question how it could be possible. Fortunately, Jesus helps with that, too.

Look at the second reading to the Romans. Because we have God's Spirit living in us, we who are sinners can be raised to new life by that Spirit. When our sins are forgiven, we begin to live a new life by loving the people we hurt by our sins, forgiving people who have hurt us, being more concerned for the

poor than for our own comfort. We are freed from worrying about the future, from holding onto grudges, and perhaps even from the fear of death itself--all because we have experienced the new life of God's Spirit and, as Ezekiel says, know that God is the LORD.

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TODAY'S READINGS

First Reading — Thus says the Lord GOD: I will open your graves, have you rise from them, and settle you on your land. Then you shall know I am the LORD, O my people! (Ezekiel 37:12-14).

Psalm — With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption (Psalm 130).

Second Reading — If Christ is in you, the spirit is alive even if the body is dead because of sin (Romans 8:8-11).

Gospel — Lazarus, dead for four days, came out of his tomb when Jesus called his name

(John 11:1-45 [3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45]).

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