



Fifth Sunday after Lent Passiontide

29th March 2020

Email Sunday Service

Introduction and Call to Worship

As we prepare to walk with Christ through his passion, let us worship with hearts full of gratitude and trust.

This Hymn can be sung or said as a poem

*Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art;
Thou my best thought, by day or by night;
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.*

*Be Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father and I, Thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.*

*Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise;
Thou mine inheritance, now and always;
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart;
O King of glory, my treasure Thou art.*

*O King of glory, my victory won;
Rule and reign in me 'til Thy will be done;
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall;
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all. Gaelic 8th Century*

Confession

Jesus died that we might live forgiven and free. Let us respond to his call and move forward to be cleansed and renewed in faith.

A short time of Silence may be taken

For those times when we have allowed the world's opinions to shape our thinking.
Lord, have mercy.

For those times when we have allowed others' judgements to silence us or dictate our actions.
Christ, have mercy.

For those times when we have allowed our own desires to limit our loving.
Lord, have mercy.

Collect

Most merciful God,
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ delivered and saved the world:
grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross we may triumph in the power of his victory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.



The Ministry of the Word

First Reading: Ezekiel 37.1-14

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, 'Mortal, can these bones live?' I answered, 'O Lord GOD, you know.' Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.'

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.' I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, 'Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely." Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD.'

A short time of Silence may be taken

Second Reading: John 11.1-45

A certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of

him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?' Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

A short time of Silence may be taken

Homily

Lazarus died but got his life back. Many people have had a similar experience, for instance: those who have had an accident and were resuscitated or those who have been in a coma - some for many years - but finally came out of it. Such people have had their lives given back to them.

Imagine how they might have felt after this. Also think of the joy and relief that their family and friends shared. How precious life can feel at moments like these. All seems a grace, a blessing, a wonder, a miracle!

It is at times like this that they could probably understand what Lazarus might have felt. Against all the odds they awake, come round and start to recognise the familiar faces of their loved ones. It's like being reborn.

However, the gospel story speaks not just to these but to all of us. Some mornings we can awaken from a very heavy sleep - almost a mini coma - where we have been in another, somewhat strange world, the world of dreams, where throughout the night we may have experienced traumatic events which often reoccur throughout the night sending us into sweats and often nightmares. We wake up from this with a very relieved feeling that our life has been given back to us.

Life is such a precious thing. But we can take it for granted. It is often only when something really traumatic happens that we look at life very differently.

Recent events have caused us to do exactly that. Many thousands of people have lost their lives in the most devastating pandemic for many generations. Their lives have been turned upside down, loved ones have died and there is the uncertainty of what things will be like when it has eventually passed. Many will be out of work, there may be a world-wide recession and so on.

Yes, the world may be a different place after this, but the human will is incredibly resourceful and many will survive it and move forward and rebuild their lives.

We can easily take life for granted, I'm sure we've all done so at one time or another, it's what humans do, have human emotions, often quite reckless and costly. But what we must try to do is to embrace life as being really precious and receive it as a gift from God, then we will not be amazed at the wonder and mystery of life.

But there is much more at stake in the story of the raising of Lazarus than adding a few extra years to one's earthly life. What is really at stake is eternal life. Jesus is the source of eternal life for all who believe in him. He came that we might have life and have it to the full, here and in the hereafter.

An Affirmation of Faith

*We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.*

*We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.*

*We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.*

*We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*

Amen.

Prayers

These can be formal or improvised and end with:

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come;

thy will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation;

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

the power and the glory,

for ever and ever.

Amen.

This Hymn can be sung or said as a poem

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
O'er this world's tempestuous sea
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us
For we have no help but thee;
Yet possessing every blessing
If our God our Father be

Saviour, breath forgiveness o'er us:
All our weaknesses thou dost know;
Though didst tread this earth before us,
Thou did feel its keenest woe;
Lone and dreary, faint and weary,
Through the desert thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending,
Fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
Love with every passion blending,
Pleasure that can never cloy:
Thus provided, pardoned, guided,
Ever can our peace destroy.

Lyrics: James Edmeston (1791 - 1867). Public Domain

Closing Prayer

Now to the King eternal,
immortal, invisible,
the only God,
be honour and glory
for ever and ever.

Amen.



The Pasque flower often called the Anemone of Passiontide