

Fifth Sunday of Lent, Year A: March 29, 2020
Living Water Inclusive Catholic Community
Liturgy Conference Call, 10:30 AM
Homily by Rev. Jacqueline M. Clarys, RCWP-USA

First Reading: Ezekiel 37:12–14. **Psalm (130) R:** “With You are kindness and plenteous redemption.” **Second Reading:** Romans 8:8–11. **Gospel Reading:** John 11:1–45.

From one perspective, today’s Gospel reading guides us tenderly to the Center of our most poignant of human dilemmas, bringing us into close proximity with the ultimate mystery of our existence, that of death and dying. Immovable and indiscriminate, mortality heads up the list of our greatest concerns, the losses it incurs a source of deeply held grief and pain. It is fair to say that even potential loss, of all kinds, stirs an intensity within us. But seen from another perspective, the Symbols and Signs¹ presented here broaden our vista, shifting us from the literal belief of childhood to the spiritually-adult appreciation of metaphor and meaning: in this way, the narrative may lead us to a wellspring of truth. So much more than a balm to soothe us, the beautiful and symbolic story of Lazarus touches us not only because it holds the heart’s wish for death’s shadow to pass us by, but also, because it extends to us a particular invitation. In tandem with the rest of today’s readings, it holds up for our consideration the central tenet of our Faith, both as individuals and as Community: *that the Spiritual Life, is everything*. That by its very nature, or we might we say, *our Very Nature*, the Spirituality by which we live takes precedence over all. The following words, often attributed to the much beloved Jesuit priest, French philosopher, theologian, geologist, and paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin, and echoed by many others, bear witness to a fact of experience we hold in common: “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.”

¹ John Shelby Spong, “Lazarus: Breaking the Final Barrier” in *The Fourth Gospel: Tales of a Jewish Mystic* (New York, NY: HarperOne, An Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 2013), 153–161.

And so it is that we meet with Ezekiel in “the valley of the dry bones,” the context of our first reading: here, God addresses the prophet as “Mortal.” Israel’s “dry bones” of despair cry out in lament, saying: “Our bones are dried up and our hope is lost: we are cut off completely.” (Here, cut off is “...a metaphor meaning [to be] within the power of death.”²) In answer, we hear today’s passage, God’s message to the People, dutifully conveyed by Ezekiel: that since the very Breath of God, Ruah, the Spirit Herself, has breathed Life into their dry bones, they are to be raised up, reborn into a new relationship with God, transformed, both morally and spiritually. Further, and most importantly, *in being recreated they will completely know their God*. Ezekiel’s mission is to lead them to an understanding of *who God is, and who they are in God*—the very Source of their renewal, and their strength, exists within this understanding, this covenant.

In this light, it doesn’t come as a surprise that John’s Community, which has formed around Jesus, is excommunicated from their Synagogue—loss is this author’s vantage point. The officials doing the expelling and excommunicating are confident in God’s law and identity, and equally confident of their own secure, exclusive place within it. After all, haven’t they absorbed the faith of their ancestors? In contrast, John is confident that in Jesus, something New, and Whole, Infinite, Unifying, and Alive is being offered to the entire world, and that it has arrived as the very fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures. And so, because of what he knows, the evangelist has no choice but to bear witness to the Jesus whose very Being up-ends the establishment, implying a new world order built upon Love, and Service, and Inclusion. Likewise, because of what we know and have experienced as followers of Jesus, we perhaps have no choice but to accept the timeless invitation extended to us by this Gospel: to see the

²Coogan, Brettler, Newsom and Perkins, editors, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha, NRSV, 4th Ed.* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), notes on p. 1214.

Divine in new and unexpected ways; to notice that which is buried in the dark tomb of our hearts, and which asks for the “stone to be rolled away;” to see where we are bound, and fearful, and to seek that which makes us free; to turn toward the Living God, the One that seeks justice for the poor and marginalized; to inquire whether we are willing to undergo continual and tireless conversion of the heart; to swap out certainty for humility; and to live with Kindness and Love, always. May the Eternal Source of “Faith, Hope, Love, and Joy”³ be quickened in us, and lead us in the ways of Life, Everlasting. Amen.

³Michael J. Gorman, Ph.D., author, professor, theologian: virtual “Town Hall,” St. Mary’s Ecumenical Institute, Baltimore, MD (March 25, 2020). “The Corona Virus and the Book of Revelation.” Online (accessed March 28, 2020).