

## REFLECTION FOR THE 5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT

Fr. Jim Cowles

This Lenten journey with the traditional disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving have been especially challenging this year. A fourth discipline thrust upon us in these unusual times is social distancing. Perhaps the latter, much like the traditional disciplines, can offer the same opportunity for personal reflection and interior transformation. If we are to join Christ in His resurrection at the end of this journey on Easter, we must also journey with Him through the cross. This requires sacrifice on many levels. The cross is often frightening, and yet, the cross is what we are called to bear.

The readings today are an expression of the power of God to give life - even in the most challenging of times. In the first reading from the prophet **Ezekiel**, God declares the impossible, *“O, my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them”* -referring here to an enslaved people, the Israelites, being set free and returned to their homeland.

And perhaps the traditional Gospel on the **5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent**, the raising of Lazarus, we can more easily identify with during these times when we are consumed with anxiety and uncertainty by the COVID-19 emergency. In a sense, by the new norm of social distancing and isolation from the familiar people and places we love, a death to a certain part of our lives has set in.

This story is more about our mortal condition here and now than it is about Resurrection. Not only for Lazarus but for us as well, what God offers to do is extraordinary. He offers life to the dead in Spirit too, He offers solace and joy to the brokenhearted, God reinstates the displaced.

Imagine for a moment seeing yourself in the place of Lazarus. Lying cold in the tomb. Dead to everything until you hear a voice calling out to you, ***“Lazarus, Come Out!”***

Putting ourselves in Lazarus' place can show us the imperfections we'd much rather ignore and how we yearn for a new spiritual freedom. Perhaps this story reminds us to live life to the fullest.

We, too, can be set free from the things that bind us; fear, pride, anxiety, and so forth. Perhaps even the oppressive nearness of a Pandemic Virus has made us re-assess our priorities and renew our trust in Divine providence.

In order to be unbound we must first be willing to step out of the relative comforts of the graves we know. The grave of selfishness, the grave of materialism, workaholism, victimhood, depression. It means your focus will no longer be on you, but on the world around you. It means leaving the world you've known and embracing the unfamiliar and unsettling.

Maybe this is what the season of Lent is all about. The days are getting longer and the sun is getting brighter. LIFE is springing up all around those who wish to acknowledge it. Human beings have an insatiable will to live and experience the fullness of LIFE. Too many search for it in all the wrong places, don't they? Don't we? We see how we have wrapped ourselves in burial bands that never allow us to experience the fullness of God's immense love. And so we pray today separated by distance while united in faith:

**Come Lord Jesus, set us free!**