

Fifth Sunday of Lent – Year A  
Fr. Chad S. Green  
Mary, Queen of Peace Catholic Church  
Sammamish, Washington  
26 March 2023

Scrutiny #3  
Ezekiel 37:12-14  
Psalm 130  
Romans 8:8-11  
(John 11:25a, 26) John 11:1-45

*Scrutiny #3: Raising of Lazarus: The Difference that Jesus Makes*

For the last three Sundays—the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent—we’ve celebrated the Scrutinies of the Elect—those who are in the final weeks before Baptism at the Easter Vigil. Today is the Third (and final) Scrutiny. The Readings from the Gospel of John for these three Sundays offer us three examples of “the conversion journey toward baptism and...the importance of faith in Christ”: The Samaritan Woman at the Well, The Man Born Blind, and The Raising of Lazarus from the Dead.<sup>1</sup> These three Gospel Readings have a long history of being “used specifically for the preparation of those about to be baptized. They closely parallel the conversion journey toward baptism and powerfully convey the importance of faith in Christ as the mark of readiness to follow his way.”<sup>2</sup>

We remember that we are not scrutinizing the Elect. Rather, we are surrounding them with our “prayers for [their] complete conversion” as they scrutinize themselves. Being able to witness our Elect and Candidates prepare for the Easter Sacraments is also a blessing for each of us, as we all seek to deepen our conversion to Christ. These prayers and blessings:

“are meant to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good. For the scrutinies are celebrated in order to deliver the elect from the power of sin and Satan, to protect them against temptation, and to give them strength in Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. These rites, therefore, should complete the conversion of the elect and deepen their resolve to hold fast to Christ and to carry out their decision to love God above all.”<sup>3</sup>

Whenever someone makes the decision of conversion, there’s someone who doesn’t like that. *Who is that person?* Satan doesn’t like it when someone chooses to follow Jesus—or when someone chooses to renew or deepen his or her commitment to following Jesus. We have no

fear of Satan. We reject, renounce, and rebuke him. But, we're also aware of his activity and his desire to separate us from God. Satan will do what he can to prevent conversion, and to create obstacles or propose doubts, fears, or questions. That's why it's so important for us to surround the Elect with our prayers, in order to drive away Satan. And it's a blessing for each one of us to be part of these prayers, as we also benefit spiritually as we seek our own deeper conversion.

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The past two weeks, with the Samaritan Woman at the Well and the Man Born Blind, there was something in particular that we took notice of. That is: *Jesus' initiative in the process of conversion*. Today's Gospel augments this point, as we notice the stark difference that Jesus' presence makes in the life of any and every person.

Jesus' approach to the situation of Lazarus seemed strange to those around Him—and perhaps still strange to us today. He received word of Lazarus' illness, yet waited two days before going to him. His disciples questioned even going back into Judea, since the Jews were trying to kill Him. When He arrived, Martha and Mary each questioned His delay: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Onlookers mocked Him: "Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?" And, when He said those words, "Take away the stone," Martha still doubted, "Lord, by now there will be a stench."

All of that is compounded by Jesus' curious words to His disciples before they went to Lazarus: "Lazarus has died. And I am glad for you that I was not there, that you may believe."

Seeing the Raising of Lazarus in the context of the Scrutinies, we go back to the instructions for the ritual: "These rites, therefore, should...deepen [our] resolve to hold fast to Christ..."<sup>4</sup> What Jesus has taught us with the Raising of Lazarus—and what seemed like strange

behavior for Him to not go right away to visit His friend who was ill—is the difference between when He’s not there and when He is there. The difference between holding fast to Christ and turning away from Him. The difference is as stark as the difference between life and death.

We can talk about Jesus being the way, the truth, and the life, and understand it in our head. That’s one thing—and an important thing. However, these three weeks of spending time with the Scrutinies are meant to help us put some flesh onto the truth that Jesus—and only Jesus—is our life. These three Gospel Readings help us feel that in our heart. Hearing the Samaritan Woman moving from isolation and outcast to her excitement in recognizing Jesus as the Christ. Hearing the Man Born Blind moving from a vulnerable and abandoned beggar to seeing Jesus, the Son of Man, with his own eyes. These Gospels motivate us to open our heart to receive what only Jesus can offer.

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The Samaritan Woman at the Well, the Man Born Blind, the Raising of Lazarus from the Dead, and our Elect and Candidates here with us today—all of them allow in some important way “for the glory of God” to be seen by others.<sup>5</sup> The Samaritan Woman, the Man Born Blind, Lazarus, our Elect and Candidates—they’re all models for us of what it looks like to move from continually thirsting and going to the wrong places—to receiving life-giving waters from Jesus. To move from blindness that we’re all born with due to original sin—to being healed and given sight through the sacraments. To move from the sadness of the certainty of dying—to joy in receiving the promise of passing through death to resurrection and eternal life.

Ultimately, when we look at the sum of all these who have been witnessing to us these past three weeks, we learn that the promise of eternal life is not something that we long for and wait for someday, or in the next life, or in Heaven. The promise of eternal life is being offered to

us *today*. Lazarus was brought back from the dead and given new life in *this* world. The Samaritan Woman was given life-giving water in *this* world. The Man Born Blind was given sight in *this* world. Our Elect and Candidates will be given new life through the Sacraments in *this* world.

Once again, on behalf of the parish, I'd like to thank our Elect and Candidates for giving us this gift, which helps each of us deepen our own conversion and resolve to hold to Christ. And to assure them of our continued prayers, love, and support as they complete and deepen their conversion.

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We look forward to the fullness of the promise of eternal life in Heaven—but we can begin to experience it even in this world. The glory of God can be visible in each one of us!

Have you asked Jesus for the gift of new life? Sometimes it sounds too easy or too good to be true. Sometimes we don't think we know *how* to ask Jesus for new life. Sometimes we feel the weight of our past, the exhaustion of our present, the uncertainty of our future. Sometimes we feel isolated, outcast, blind, or even lifeless. It's in these very spots that Jesus met those three—meets any of us—in a most surprising way.

As we prepare to enter Holy Week—the holiest days of the year—I encourage you to make this your prayer (if you'd like, repeat after me):

Jesus, show me the way to new life.  
Jesus, give me the courage and openness of the Samaritan Woman, the Man Born Blind, and the Elect and Candidates in our parish.  
Jesus, roll away the stone and call me forth, as you did Lazarus.  
Jesus, show me the way to new life.

I don't know all the circumstances of your life. I don't know how or when Jesus will answer your prayer. But, I know this. He's done it for me in ways that I never could've

expected or thought were possible. I know He's already done it for you before. And, I know He will continue to do it for you! He has "promised, and [He] will do it!"<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Diocese of San Jose Ministry News: "Q&A: Can you use Year A readings on the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Sundays of Lent even at Masses without a Scrutiny?"

<https://www.dsj.org/qa-can-you-use-year-a-readings-on-the-3rd-4th-and-5th-sundays-of-lent-even-at-masses-without-a-scrutiny/>

<sup>2</sup> Diocese of San Jose Ministry News: "Q&A: Can you use Year A readings on the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Sundays of Lent even at Masses without a Scrutiny?"

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<sup>3</sup> RCIA No. 141

<sup>4</sup> RCIA No. 141

<sup>5</sup> John 11:4

<sup>6</sup> Ezekiel 37:14