

Homily Notes for the 5th Sunday of Lent Year A

Ez 37: 12-14; Ps 130: 1-8; Rom 8: 8-11; Jn 11: 1-45

Jesus is our resurrection and our life

Because He has given us of the Spirit, we are no longer dead, but alive

In Jesus is the fullness of redemption.

Psalm 130: is worth meditating on today as we have listened to our readings on this 5th Sunday of Lent. Last week we would have celebrated the 4th Week of Lent known as “Laetare” Sunday which means to rejoice, taken from the first word of the introit as we enter the church. It was to set a tone of Joyful anticipation of the Easter mystery of which we are now half way to. However, many of us probably weren’t feeling very joyful at all as gathering for Mass was suspended earlier in the week and would be suspended until further notice. Those of us that watched Bishop Matano preside at Mass at the Cathedral could feel the heaviness of heart expressed as he asked himself “What words can be said in lieu of the pandemic that has turned our world upside down and has caused the suspension of coming together as community to celebrate Mass.” Our hope as the Bishop announced was our unity with Jesus and that Jesus will never abandoned us.

Ps 130 is a prayer of Pardon and Mercy. It is a short psalm only consisting of 8 verses. But is very appropriate and a powerful expression of our need for God. Who else should we be calling out to from the depths as we deal with this invisible enemy as the coronavirus has become known? Who else but the Lord, “Lord hear my cry, be attentive to my cry of mercy?” But we must also acknowledge our own sinfulness as verses 3 & 4 acclaim, “If you, O Lord, mark our iniquities, Lord, who can stand? But with you is forgiveness, that you may be revered.” Acknowledgement of our sins and crying out to the Lord is what is needed for mercy to take place. And reverence to God is to experience God’s mercy which leads to a greater sense of God. The next verses speak

of waiting with a longing for the Lord, “our souls wait for his word. We look for the Lord with our souls, more than sentinels on post through the night wait for daybreak.” In other words, our trust in the Lord must be withstanding above all things, for no where else is there the kindness shown or the redemption given than from God himself. And God will redeem us from all our sins.

As we reflect upon this Psalm of Pardon and Mercy, we have to not only look at our own personal relationship with God, but we also have to reflect upon our world and the course of events that have taken place in the last 2 decades. What precedence has God taken in our lives in the last decade or so- for those of us that are older, since the year 2000. What has God been replaced with in our lives or how about our societal morality, even our spiritual morality. Do we hold steady to living out our lives according to God’s precepts given to us through scripture and the teachings of Jesus himself or do we join in to the secular immoralities that have been dictated and accepted by the current culture using the excuse that “it’s time for the Church to catch up to the current times, culture is ever evolving”. What it comes to is the disregard of the Sacrament of marriage, the total disregard for the sanctity of life and violation of the 2 greatest commandments of “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself”. Do you really believe that cultural evolution that promotes more or even greater sin would be acceptable to God? If you look at the hard facts that’s what is being accepted. Couples living together or not being joined in marriage before God (absence of church), abortion, acceptance of euthanasia and assisted suicide and invitro-fertilization, to just name a few of the major issues.

This pandemic of Covid-19 may have a silver lining. Maybe it is our true walk in the desert this Lent. Maybe it is our Babylonian exile, calling us to reflect upon the conduct and the morality of the world. This includes all people. People of faith including all faiths such as Muslims, Christians and Jewish, to name the major religions. It also includes people of no faith in God such as atheists, agnostics and pagans. It even can be broken down to clergy, religious and the laity within all faiths.

We have been remanded to our own exile as a result of the coronavirus. Our 1st reading from Ezekiel comes during the Babylonian exile of the Israelites. Ezekiel is the 3rd of the

great writing prophets behind Isaiah and Jeremiah. Ezekiel was a priest and was exiled to Babylon along with the other inhabitants of Judah. The prophetic ministry of Ezekiel was a testament to the awesome faithfulness and power of the almighty God. He prophesized that only God possessed the power to bring life out of the ashes of despair and failure. The people of Israel believed that God had punished them due to their disobedience and sinfulness. The exile was God's divine retribution and only God could breathe life into their hopeless situation.

The verses from Ezekiel are the words spoken by God to Ezekiel in the vision of the dry bones to relay to the Israel people. They are words of the restoration of Israel given through the mercy and forgiveness of God. Just as the parched dry bones were covered with muscle and flesh and brought back to life through the spirit that God gave them, so too would God breath life back into Israel. So too will God breath life back into our world, if we cry out for mercy and forgiveness.

This is the silver lining within the Covid-19 pandemic. This is an opportunity to spend some time in heartfelt meditation as we are remanded to our homes and asked to limit our social activities. It has caused us to slow down and to step back from the hectic pace that our culture has developed and enveloped. It is a time to spend in contemplation of the complacency of our moral ethics set forth by God himself. It is an opportunity to do some serious reflection of conscience of selfishness. Are we really loving God with all our hearts, minds, our souls and all our strength? Are we really loving our neighbors? This is a true time of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. This is a Lenten season that we may never experience again in our lifetime. But it is needed!

Our Gospel reading of the "Raising of Lazarus" is a famous and familiar Gospel. It speaks of faith, trust, hope and life. It shows us what Ezekiel believed in: faithfulness and the awesome power of God to breath life back into and restore our mortal bodies. It also exemplifies what we read from Paul today to the Romans. "That if you are not in the spirit, but only in the flesh, then you cannot please God, but through Jesus Christ the Spirit dwells within you and if the Spirit of Christ dwells within you, then He who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise your mortal bodies." This is a time to reunite

our mortal selves to the Spirit that has been suppressed within us by the worldly desires that have consumed us.

This past week we were given many opportunities and blessings; on Wednesday 3/25 was the Solemnity of the “Annunciation of the Lord”. This was an opportunity to renew our hope in the God who was sending us the Messiah incarnate. In addition to this Solemnity, Pope Francis asked the world to pray the “Our Father” in unison with him from Rome. An opportunity to reunite ourselves with the faithful of the world as all His children to glorify and revere God. On Friday Pope Francis blessed the world in his **Urbi et Orbi** (‘to the city [of Rome] and to the world’) a papal address and apostolic blessing given by the pope on certain solemn occasions. He spoke and made reference to us from the Gospel of Mark, “The Calming of the Storm at Sea”, when Jesus asks the disciples, “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” Maybe we all need to reread that scripture. And during the address and blessing was an opportunity to spend time as a world with Pope Francis in Adoration and Benediction from St. Peter’s. Even all the way from Rome, the very real presence of Christ wasn’t diminished in the least from my home!

This is a time to raise our voices and cry out to God from the depths of our souls. This is a time for the world to unite in faith. This is a time to trust in the Lord and to wait for His word. Whether there are those that may feel this pandemic is a retribution from God or those that believe it is an error of human kind or a natural disaster that effected the world, there is one thing that we must all agree on and that is we must look for God with all our hearts, all our minds, and all our souls. For there is no kindness shown or redemption given greater than from God Himself.