

**Sunday, April 2, 2017**

**5th Sunday of Lent**

**Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion**

**Mass Readings:**

**1st Reading:** Ezekiel 37:12-14

**2nd Reading:** Romans 8:8-11

**Responsorial:** Psalm 130:1-8

**Gospel:** John 11:1-45

**Growing in Faith and Trust in the Lord**

*So they took away the stone.* (John 11:41)

Raising Lazarus from the dead was one of the most amazing miracles Jesus performed. But think about Martha. In this story, we see Jesus bringing this grieving sister from a theoretical faith to actual, living faith in him. In some respects, this is just as amazing as raising someone from the dead.

That's why Martha makes a great Lenten companion for us. Hers is the kind of transformation Jesus wants to bring about in all of us. So let's look at Martha's progression to deeper faith:

At first, Martha trusts that Jesus can answer her prayers: "Lord, if you had been here . . ." (John 11:21).

Jesus says Lazarus will rise, but Martha doesn't believe it can happen now. She pushes it into a distant future time: "I know he will rise in the resurrection on the last day" (John 11:24).

Jesus asks if she believes he is the resurrection and the life. Martha responds generally: "I have come to believe that you are the Christ" (John 11:27). She can't seem to make the jump from Messiah to resurrection.

When Jesus asks Martha to open the tomb, she hesitates: "Lord, by now there will be a stench" (John 11:39). So Jesus nudges her forward: "Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?" (11:40). You can see it here and now, not just in some distant future. Martha needs to apply her faith.

Will she allow her brother's body to be brought out? You can almost feel the struggle as she grapples with this decision. Jesus isn't afraid of the stench, but he waits for her to decide. Finally, Martha gives permission, and the tomb is opened. Jesus calls Lazarus forth, and Martha comes to believe.

Every Sunday this Lent, Jesus has been leading us to take another step forward in faith. As he did with Martha, he brings us along gradually. Even if we waver, he waits for us to say yes to the next step.

*"Jesus, I remove the stone! Come, Lord, and bring me to life!"*

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**Questions for Reflection or Discussion:**

1. The first reading begins with these words: “Thus says the Lord GOD: O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them, and bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and have you rise from them, O my people! I will put my spirit in you that you may live.” It ends with these words: “I have promised, and I will do it, says the LORD.”
  - In what way do these words from the first reading refer to what happens at Baptism?
  - “I will put my spirit in you that you may live.” What practical steps can you take to help you focus on and be more sensitive to the fact that the very Spirit of the Living God is present within you?
2. The responsorial psalm opens with this heartfelt cry of the psalmist: “Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; LORD, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to my voice in supplication.” It then goes on to describe the Lord’s forgiveness, kindness, and the redemption -- and the psalmist’ great “trust in the Lord.”
  - In what way does the opening cry of the psalmist lead to the words that follow in the psalm?
  - What can you learn from this psalm regarding how to approach the Eucharist, or your times of prayer, with a deeper trust in the Lord’s forgiveness, kindness, and redemption?
3. The second reading begins with these words: “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” It continues with these words: “But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit dwelling in you.”
  - What do these words mean to you?
  - Do they fill you with a hope, confidence, and trust in the Lord or do they fill you with fear? Why?
4. In the Gospel, Jesus receives a message from Mary and Martha that their brother Lazarus is ill. He responds to the message in this way: “When Jesus heard this he said, ‘This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.’ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place where he was.”
  - After Jesus heard that his friend Lazarus was seriously ill, why do you think he stayed where he was for two more days before going “back to Judea”?
  - In what way, can this reading give us hope when we think God is delaying in answering our prayers?
5. The meditation begins with these words: “Raising Lazarus from the dead was one of the most amazing miracles Jesus performed. But think about Martha. In this story, we see Jesus bringing this grieving sister from a theoretical faith to actual, living faith in him. In some respects, this is just as amazing as raising someone from the dead.”
  - Why would bringing Martha “from a theoretical faith to actual, living faith” in Jesus be “just as amazing as raising someone from the dead”?
  - Was there ever a time when you saw God glorified in a situation even when it did not go according to your expectations? What happened as a result?
6. The meditation ends with these words: “Every Sunday this Lent, Jesus has been leading us to take another step forward in faith. As he did with Martha, he brings us along gradually. Even if we waver, he waits for us to say yes to the next step.”
  - What is the “next step” the Lord may be asking you to take during the remaining weeks of Lent?
7. Take some time to pray and ask the Lord to remove any doubts and discouragement, so that you can live the new life he has called you to. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

***“Jesus, I remove the stone! Come, Lord, and bring me to life!”***

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is in partner relations for **The Word Among Us Partners**, (<http://www.waupartners.org/>); a ministry of **The Word Among Us** ([www.wau.org](http://www.wau.org)) to the military, prisoners, women with crisis pregnancies or who have had abortions, and college students. He is also

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