

Sunday, March 29, 2020

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

Hearing Jesus' Voice to "Come Out" of Our Tomb of Sin and Come to Him

Lazarus, come out! (John 11:43)

From a homily by Pope Francis:

"We all have within us some areas, some parts of our heart that are not alive, that are a little dead. . . . But if we become very attached to these tombs and guard them within us and do not will that our whole heart rise again to life, we become corrupted and our soul begins to give off, as Martha says, an 'odor' (see John 11:39), the stench of a person who is attached to sin. And Lent has something to do with this. Because all of us . . . can hear what Jesus said to Lazarus: 'He cried out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"' (11:43).

"Today I invite you to think for a moment: Where is the dead part of my soul? Where is my tomb? . . . Let us think: what part of the heart can be corrupted because of my attachment to sin, one sin or another? And to remove the stone, to take away the stone of shame and allow the Lord to say to us, as he said to Lazarus, "Come out!" That all our soul might be healed, might be raised by the love of Jesus, by the power of Jesus. He is capable of forgiving us. We all need it! All of us. We are all sinners, but we must be careful not to become corrupt! Sinners we may be, but he forgives us. Let us hear that voice of Jesus who, by the power of God, says to us, 'Come out! Leave that tomb you have within you. Come out. I give you life, I give you happiness, I bless you, I want you for myself.'

"May the Lord today, on this Sunday, which speaks so much about the resurrection, give us all the grace to rise from our sins, to come out of our tombs; with the voice of Jesus, calling us to go out, to go to him." (April 6, 2014)

"Jesus, I hear you calling. Help me to rise from my sins."

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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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! It ends with these words: I will put my spirit in you that you may live. I have promised, and I will do it, says the LORD.*
 - If you were a member of the exiled people of Israel, far from your country, what do you think these prophetic words of Ezekiel would have meant to you?
 - In what ways can these words from the first reading also refer to what happens to each of us at Baptism?
 - In response to the ending words, 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. If you, O Lord, mark iniquities, Lord, who can stand? It continues with these words: But with you is forgiveness, that you may be revered. I trust in the Lord; my soul trusts in his word. More than sentinels wait for the dawn, let Israel wait for the Lord. For with the Lord is kindness and with him is plenteous redemption; And he will redeem Israel from all their iniquities.*
 - In what way does the opening cry of the psalmist lead to the words that follow in the psalm?
 - How do these words describe the Lord’s forgiveness, kindness, and redemption -- and the fruits coming from it?
 - 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. It closes 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 the beginning words mean to you?
 - Do the ending words of the reading fill you with a hope, confidence, and trust in the Lord or do they fill you with some doubts, or even fear? Why?
4. The Gospel reading tells the story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead. When Jesus first receives a message from Mary and Martha that their brother Lazarus is ill, he responds in this way: *“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.”* His response to his disciples’ resistance to going to Lazarus in Bethany was: *Are there not twelve hours in a day? If one walks during the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks at night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.* Jesus’ response to Martha when she came to him was, *I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?*
 - 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?
 - *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever* (Hebrews 13:8). How do the words of Jesus above apply to each of us today, individually and as God’s people?
 - In what ways, can the Gospel reading give us hope when we think God is delaying in answering our prayers?
 - 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?
5. The meditation from a homily by Pope Francis ends with these words: *“Sinners we may be, but he forgives us. Let us hear that voice of Jesus who, by the power of God, says to us, ‘Come out! Leave that tomb you have within you. Come out. I give you life, I give you happiness, I bless you, I want you for myself.’ May the Lord today, on this Sunday, which speaks so much about the resurrection, give us all the grace to rise from our sins, to come out of our tombs; with the voice of Jesus, calling us to go out, to go to him.”*
 - What message do you think Pope Francis was trying to convey with these words and how do they apply to you?
 - What is the “next step” the Lord may be asking you to take during the remaining weeks of Lent?

Take some time to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to “rise from our sins, to come out of our tombs; with the voice of Jesus, calling us to go to him.” Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

“Jesus, I hear you calling. Help me to rise from my sins.”