



FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Year A

Ezekiel 37:12-14

Romans 8:8-11

John 11:1-45

GATHERING

(White cloths, a crucifix and a copy of the Apostles' Creed are arranged on a table covered with purple cloth.)

This week, as we rapidly approach Easter, we are confronted with the central mystery of our Christian faith. Do we believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life? Jesus promises that believing and living this truth makes us truly alive. We reflected last week on Jesus' encounter with the man born blind. We prayed that Christ be our light. How did Christ help you see and respond to something in a new way this past week? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The leader invites members to silent attention to the presence of God within and among them. After some minutes of quiet, a member of the community prays as follows on behalf of all.)

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the

desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Thoughts in Solitude by Thomas Merton
1958 Farrar, Straus & Giroux. Used with
permission.

(A selection of instrumental music is played.)

Focus Question

- ◆ Describe a time when you felt dead inside.

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

Commentary

In these challenging times, “Just hanging in there,” is a familiar response to the question “How are you doing”? The demands of everyday living can consume and drain us – physically, emotionally and spiritually. Each of us experiences *desert experiences* when we feel spiritually dead, when we become like *dry bones*. At times like these, we can lose touch with the central belief and mystery of our faith – that God is God of the living and the dead; that even in the darkest days, God calls us from death into new life.

The readings this week remind us of the inevitability of physical death, as well as the gravity of spiritual death. Death is something many of us prefer not to think about. At the same time, we expend tremendous amounts of energy and resources to prolong our lives.

Dr. Ira Byock, a specialist in hospice and palliative care says, “Death is not primarily a medical event. Death is a personal and spiritual event, yet we are largely concerned about preparing for the medical.” Folks involved in the dying process of a family member are overwhelmed with so many issues: insurance, Title XIX, Medicare, Assisted Living, etc. The recent death of my mother provided me with the opportunity to experience the difficulty and grief surrounding physical death, as well as the hope and joy

surrounding assisting a loved one's journey *home*.

Our earthly life, as messy as it is at times, is meant to transition into the next life – an eternal life. Jesus extended this promise to Martha and to each of us, “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.” Living each day in response to his promise can transform us from dry bones. God’s breath, his spirit, empowers us, giving us new life. Like Lazarus, Jesus calls us out of death into new life daily. Jesus asked Martha if she trusted him. “Do you believe this, he asked” To us today, he might ask, “How deeply do you believe this?”

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ What is it like to think about your own death?
- ◆ Who are the most *alive* elderly people you know?
- ◆ How is Jesus inviting you to embrace new life in some way these days?
- ◆ Share how your family of origin reacts to and handles the death of a loved one.
- ◆ Recall a funeral ritual in which you participated that honored the Christian belief that death is a passage and invited you to embrace life in Christ.

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ Help your parish to promote parishioner participation in your town’s Household Hazwaste and Electronics collections, to keep toxics out of our air and water. Your town will give you the information to disseminate.
- ◆ Offer to be involved in the ministry of bringing the Eucharist to shut-ins in your parish.
- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes this week for reflection and prayer. Re-read this week’s gospel. Listen for Jesus to put you in touch with the dead places in your life he invites you to leave behind for new life in him.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader invites the community to a time of quiet. After a minute of silence, the gospel of the week is re-read by a member of the community. Following

the reading, the leader poses this question to the members: “What does Christ say to you/us in hearing this gospel today?” The community pauses for a full five to seven minutes of prayerful attention to how Christ speaks to them in this gospel. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention just a word or two that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally.

Following this sharing, members join in singing, “You Are Mine.” The song may be found on the Internet. When the song is complete, the community prays together as follows.)

The Apostles’ Creed

All: I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ,
his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin
Mary.

He suffered under Pontius
Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right
hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and
the dead.

I believe in the Holy
Spirit, the holy catholic
Church, the communion
of saints, the forgiveness
of sins, the resurrection
of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.