

Wellspring Fransalian Center for Spirituality

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today, we celebrate the Fifth Sunday of Lent. First Sunday, we met Jesus in the desert. The Second Sunday, we met Jesus on the mountain, transfigured in glory. The third Sunday, we met Jesus in a Samaritan town in conversation with a woman of ill repute, calling her to a change and transformation of her life. On the fourth Sunday, we met Jesus giving sight to a man who was born blind.

The fifth Sunday of Lent calls us to reflect on the mystery of the resurrection. All our readings today are about living a risen life, a new life, a changed and transformed life and life in the spirit. Ezekiel prophesied the dead bones into new life, the Psalmist sang of rising from the depth to the height, Saint Paul spoke of dying to the flesh and rising to live in the spirit and Jesus called Lazarus out of his tomb to live again a new life.

Ezekiel, the Prophet (first reading) reminds us that it is by the Spirit of God that we will be called forth to rise from the dead and live. He had a vision of a wide valley filled with dead, dry, and lifeless bones. He felt called to prophesy to these bones and call on the wind and spirit to bring them to life. He prophesied and saw those lifeless limbs being drawn into wholeness and dancing across the valley – the dead bones came to life and began to walk again. Ezekiel saw that this vision was about his people. His people were like dead, dry and lifeless bones. These bones in the valley needed sinews, flesh, skin, breath, and spirit to bring them together into life again. Similarly, his people needed to renew their faith and be empowered by the spirit of God.

This reminds me of the story of two brothers who were convicted of stealing sheep in a village. According to the local custom, they were branded on their forehead with the letters "S T" which stood for "Sheep Thief." One of them, unable to bear the stigma, ran away to a foreign place. But people would ask him about the letters on his brow, and what they meant. So, he moved from place to place and finally ended his life and was buried in a forgotten grave.

The other brother repented of his misdeed and did not go away from his home. He said to himself, "I can't escape from the fact that I stole sheep. So, I will remain here, until I win back the respect of my neighbors and myself." As the years passed by, he established a reputation for respectability, honesty and integrity.

One day a stranger in this town saw this man (by now, old) with the letters "S T" branded on his forehead. He asked a native what they signified. After a little thought, the native said, "It all

happened many years ago, and I have forgotten the details. I think the letters are an abbreviation of SAINT." The man whose forehead was branded with "S T" to signify "SHEEP-THIEF" had repented, renewed and transformed his life so much that other people, by now, experienced him as a "SAINT." The "SHEEP THIEF" died and the "SAINT" rose.

Saint Paul assures us (Second reading) that the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead is alive in us, transforming us to live the new life in Christ. It is this spirit that converts and transforms the "SHEEP THIEF" to the "SAINT" – let the thief die and the saint rise and live.

Saint Paul was deeply conscious of the struggle of Christian living, choosing to live "life in the spirit" as opposed to "life in the flesh". For Paul, "life in the flesh" characterized the person who chose to live a "self-sufficient" life and not turn toward the help of the spirit. He says that those who are "in the flesh", that is "self-sufficient", cannot please God because they have preferred that "self-sufficiency" which caused the downfall of humankind in the first place. Living "in the Spirit" means dying to self and rising to the spirit dwelling within us. The Spirit of God is alive in believers and believers must live in that Spirit.

The Gospel reading of today tells us the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus had died and was in the tomb for four days. Jesus called him out and he came out, "tied hand and foot with burial bands." Jesus not only called him out of the tomb and gave him new life but also freed him from those binding forces. We are challenged to reflect on those forces in our life from which we need to be freed. We are called to reflect on the kind of death that we need to experience in order to come to the newness of life. As Paul reminded us in today's second reading, "life in the flesh" must die so that we may choose to "live in the spirit."

The resurrection is not just something in the distant future. The new life in the resurrection is for now. We are a people of the resurrection. We have died to sin and risen to a new life in Christ. In the first reading, we hear Ezekiel speaking of the exiles returning to their homeland as rising from the grave and the restoration of life. He sees this national restoration as a new creation by God's own spirit. In the second reading, we hear St. Paul reminding the Christians in Rome, "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You are not in the flesh, You are in the Spirit, the Spirit of God dwells in you."

We must live our risen life everyday – rising above our imperfections, weaknesses, failures, mistakes, selfishness, and sinfulness. St. John XXIII tells us, "Every time I fell, I got up, looked at Jesus and went straight ahead." Many such falling and rising bring us to the final resurrection and eternal life.

I encourage you to take a few minutes each day of this week to be still and to think about how your day has been and on how you have been striving to rise above your imperfections, failures, sinfulness, etc. as you went about doing your daily chores.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

The Fifth Sunday of Lent

March 26, 2023

**Lent stimulates us to let the Word of God penetrate our life and, in this way, to know the fundamental truth: Who we are, where we come from, where we must go, what path we must take in life.
(Pope Benedict XVI)**

Collect

By your help, we beseech you, Lord our God,
may we walk eagerly in that same charity
with which, out of love for the world,
your Son handed himself over to death.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Liturgy of the Word

Prayerfully read the first reading and then read my reflections below and spend a few moments of personal reflection. Do the same with Responsorial Psalm and other readings.

Strive to let “Steadfast Love” become your way of being, living and acting and let it define who you are.

Ezekiel 37:12-14

**I will put my spirit in you that you may live.
I have promised, I will do it, says the Lord.**

The Prophet Ezekiel lived in politically turbulent times. He wanted his contemporaries to be filled with the hope that they would emerge from Babylonian oppression as from a tomb. He gave them his vision of “dry bones”. This vision gave a vivid expression of the hopelessness and desperation of those exiled in a foreign, unfriendly Babylon. Without a land to call their own, they were like dry bones strewn on a desert plain, scorched by an unrelenting sun.

Ezekiel calls them to hear God's word and promises that the dry bones will be covered with sinews, flesh and skin and come to new life. The desperate will be filled with a new life and a new spirit. What a promise! The prophet shifts metaphors and begins to speak of the exiles returning to their homeland as rising from the grave and the restoration of life. He sees this national restoration as a new creation by God's own spirit.

Psalm 130

This is one of the Psalms of Ascent.....from the depth to the heights. The geographical climb up to Jerusalem, that the pilgrim must take, symbolizes the pilgrim's spiritual ascent to God. This movement from the "depths" to the heights can happen only in the unmerited grace of God, "If you, O Lord, kept a record of our sins, who can stand...with you is forgiveness...."

This is the amazing Grace: with you is forgiveness! And you don't keep records!

**Out of the depths I cry to you O Lord;
Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive,
to my voice in supplication.**

Romans 8:8-11

**Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You are not in the flesh,
You are in the Spirit, the Spirit of God dwells in you.**

St. Paul was deeply conscious of the struggle of Christian living, choosing to live "life in the spirit" as opposed to "life in the flesh". For Paul, "life in the flesh" characterized the person who chose to live a "self-sufficient" life and not turn toward the help of the spirit. He says that those who are "in the flesh", that is "self-sufficient", cannot please God because they have preferred that "self-sufficiency" which caused the downfall of humankind in the first place.

Living "in the Spirit" means accepting the gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It means openness to communion with God. The Spirit of God is alive in believers and believers must live in that Spirit.

John 11:1-45

Jesus has the power to untie the binding forces in our life and let us go free. Leave it to the Lord and the Lord will do the best for us when it is best for us. Jesus brings new life, new power, new presence.

The story of the raising of Lazarus, challenges us to reflect on those forces in our life from which we need to be freed. We are called to reflect on the kind of death that we need to experience in order to come to the newness of life. As Paul reminded us in today's second reading that "life in the flesh" must die so that we may choose to "live in the spirit". We are challenged to trust in the Lord and let the Lord do the best for us in His own time and His own place.

Lazarus is "the one Jesus loved". He was mourned and missed by his sisters and by Jesus himself, "Jesus wept". Lazarus is a paradigm for every believer, loved by Jesus. Jesus called out loudly to Lazarus: "Come Out". This call should resound in our years today. We are today's "loved ones", beloved believers. We need to come out and be "untied" and freed by His loving embrace, His Grace.

Be Still for a few moments!

Pray for your needs and those of your family and community.

Spiritual Communion

Lord Jesus, I believe in your real presence in the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Altar. I place myself in your presence and adore you, worship you and glorify you. I am unable to receive you in Holy Communion at Mass today. I hunger and thirst for your way, your truth and your life. Come into my heart Lord and satisfy my hunger and quench my thirst. Bless me that I may give witness to your presence in my life. Amen

Be Still for a few moments!

Saint of the Day, March 26 - St. Catherine of Genoa and 17 other saints are remembered this day

Catherine was born in Genoa in 1447, the last of five children of Jacopo Fieschi and Francesca di Negro, members of the nobility in Genoa. At 13, she attempted to become a nun but failed because of her age. After this Catherine appears to have put the idea aside without any further attempt. At 16, she married Julian, a nobleman who turned out to be selfish and unfaithful. For a while she tried to deal with her disappointment by a life of selfish pleasure.

One day in confession she had a new sense of her own sins and how much God loved her. She reformed her life and gave good example to Julian, who soon turned from his self-centered life

to a life of generosity. Julian's spending, however, had ruined them financially. He and Catherine decided to dedicate themselves to works of charity in a large hospital in Genoa. After Julian's death in 1497, Catherine took over management of the hospital. She wrote about purgatory which, she said, begins on earth for souls open to God. Life with God in heaven is a continuation and perfection of the life with God begun on earth. She died on September 15, 1510, exhausted by her life of self-sacrifice and was canonized in 1737.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

**In God's eyes, love is never absent.
In God's heart, forgiveness is never impossible.
In God's embrace, no one is ever alone or forgotten.**