

Lazarus, here, Come out!

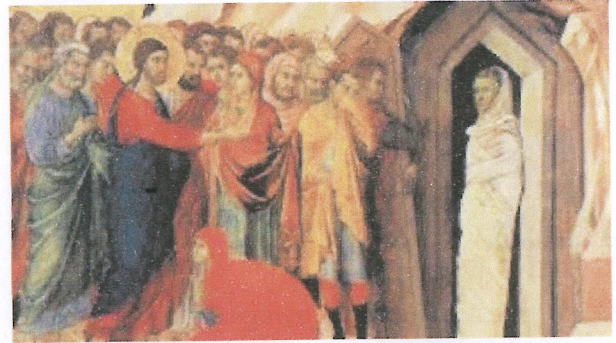
Unfortunately, the short excerpt which makes up this Sunday's first reading represents only the final verses of Ezekiel's famous vision. I encourage you to read the story of his vision—the hopelessness, the chaos and depression in Ezekiel Chapter 37: verses 1-14. The similarities of that people with our situation today are striking.

They were exiled in Babylon, and far from the land that was their home and their identity. They thought themselves to be a people without a purpose, with no hope or foothold in the future. They had no leaders to inspire them. They were just “dry bones”, strewn in a field, parched by spiritual dryness, by pride and haunted by their infidelity to their God. Hanging over them was the looming likelihood that Babylon would be the grave of God's people, that they would exist no more, and all their lives, their hopes and future had been destroyed. In a word, they believed it was the death of a people.

For the Christian today, remembering our origins in God, the faith in which we were nurtured, the faith of our forebears, it is easy to recognise that Babylon has overtaken our Christian culture. We are often laid low by the dry emptiness of materialism; indifference to the Christian roots of our country's value system; the marginalisation of the religious voice, an apathy towards the role of the Church in society and the mockery of the gospel as a valid path to follow. In the experience of feeling laid low, it is tempting to feel, *Is this all we have? Is this our resting place?* The exiles of Ezekiel's time were poorly disposed to understand their situation as retribution they had brought on themselves. In fact, they accused God of abandoning them. Ezekiel (in Chapter 18) replied to their complaining, that they were responsible and culpable for sin and its consequences. In our own day we can validly interpret much of the society in which we live and move as desert-like, which looks for life and meaning in drugs, consumerism, and eternal entertainment. Like the Israelites, at times we want God to do things, to intervene.....but maybe Lent is trying to teach us that God already has begun to intervene, by giving us strength, vision and energy through his abiding presence among us. Where is this abiding presence? Quite simply, it is guaranteed in the Liturgy and in the Sacraments. This is where we *live*, this is where our inner power house is found, this is the antidote to that feeling of helplessness, of being like the *dry bones*.

I say this to you all - young and old - fervent or faltering—the celebration of the Easter Triduum which lies ahead has the power to strengthen and transform— please don't underestimate its personal

effect for your life. Above all, don't stay away from the community on Holy Thursday and Good Friday. And, above all else in the year, don't miss The Easter Vigil, which - as I have said before, is “*light for those in darkness.....mercy for those who are sinners...strength for those who are weak.....direction for those who are lost....inspiration for those who are struggling.....warmth for those who have grown cold....and love, acceptance and joy for all who desire to be with the Risen Lord*”.



The Gospel story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead is not just *yet another incident* in the ministry of Jesus. It definitively reveals him as one who carries the power of God. He not only opens the eyes of the blind, he also raises the dead! He brings back life to dead dry bones. In marvelling at what he did for Lazarus, let us not fail to realise that we too often in our life are in exile—sometimes because of personal sin, often because of the struggle we experience in living the Gospel in a culture which increasingly seeks to compromise the Gospel or jeer at it. The *dry bones* of the exiled people in the time of Ezekiel were challenged to “Hear the word of the Lord”. In the *Living Water* of the Easter Three Days—*The Triduum*, and especially at the Easter Vigil, that change comes to us. It is a *once a year* experience; it is not to be missed: it is a fountain of new life. Truly, it is restoration to life.

The future of Israel depended on hearing the word of the Lord and heeding it. Jesus who is the Word of the Lord, is the Lord of Life. He calls each of us by name - inviting us to be with him. “Here, Come out”, he cries, “Come into the light!”

Jesus was outraged by death. He loved life. The Easter Liturgy puts it this way: Jesus challenged death to a duel and he triumphed not for his own sake, since as God he was not subject to death, but for our sake and for our salvation he conquered death and invited us into life. Is it possible that we can live the life of God? Only by the power of his word. Like Lazarus, let us listen for his voice, summoning us and respond in the Holy Week which now fast approaches.