



Fifth Sunday of Lent
† Sunday 2nd April 2017

Cycle of Prayer: Candidates for the Sacraments, Wanderers and Penitents
Keynote: To live and breathe God's Spirit

Prophet Ezekiel 37: 12-14

The Lord says, *'I am going to open your graves, I mean to raise you from your graves, my people, and lead you back to the soil of Israel.'* Then comes the climax of God's Promise, *'You will know that I am the Lord God... I shall put my spirit ('ruah' – wind, breath, spirit) in you, and you will live.'* The prophet Ezekiel is sent to the Jewish exiles in Babylon to preach the word of God and bring new life to a dead Israel. The image of a great battle, the bones of the dead littering the ground, bleached and dry, ravaged by wild animals – scattered. The image is used for the prophet to teach that God will gather the bones of Israel and fulfil the promise of restoration. We take the 'breath of life' very much for granted until someone close to us dies and the last human breath gasps from the dying. In the gospel today the voice (breath) of God will call Lazarus from the tomb giving him new breath (life).

Responsorial Psalm 129 [130] – A psalm of repentance and trust in God

Letter of Paul to the Romans 8: 8-11

'People who are interested only in unspiritual things can never be pleasing to God.' Paul contrasts 'flesh' and things of the 'spirit'. The justified Christian is filled with a new life as the result of God's love shown in Christ, and this says Paul is because, *'the Spirit of God has made his home in you. In fact, unless you possessed the Spirit of Christ you would not belong to him.'* Referring to the 'flesh' – the body that may be dead because of sin, Paul reminds the faithful at Rome, *'if Christ is in you then your spirit is life itself because you have been justified.'* With the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead living in you then, says Paul, *'he who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your own mortal bodies through his Spirit living in you.'*

Gospel according to John 11: 1-45

There was no mistaking Lazarus' death, for when Jesus asks for the stone to be rolled away, Martha warns, *'Lord, by now he will smell, this is the fourth day.'* The grief, more than just hangs in the air, it is manifest. There are tears, sadness and mourning by the family, and also by Jesus himself for Lazarus was his friend. Mary reminds Jesus, *'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'* Sadly, the scoffers are here too, maybe moved in sympathy to say, *'He opened the eyes of the blind man, could he not have prevented this man's death?'* There is the figure of Jesus amidst all this grief. *'Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer... so that they may believe it was you who sent me.'* Then Jesus, *'cried in a loud voice, "Lazarus, here! Come out!" The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with bands of stuff and a cloth over his face. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, let him go free."* Just two thoughts: The tomb of death is a prison Jesus sets the believer free. Jesus also invites the bystanders to believe, *'I am the resurrection, If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he shall live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'* The evangelist concludes, *'Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.'*