

LENT V A

Ezekiel was deported to Babylon around the year 507 B.C. Prior to this he witnessed several battles including the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and the haunting vision of dried bones described by Ezekiel earlier in chapter 37, probably is the background to today's imagery. What Ezekiel actually means in today's passage is not about raising people from the dead, but releasing them from the captivity and slavery of their exile in Babylon. Through the Prophet God is assuring his people that they will live again in freedom. They will be raised from the death of slavery and filled with life, new life, a life that springs from God's own spirit.

It's the same spirit of God that Paul is talking about in the second reading. The same indwelling spirit that we received at baptism which will release us from the grave of an unspiritual life, a life concentrated on selfish desires, and help us to live a spirit-filled life of intimacy with God. Paul stresses the empowering action of God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

Today's Gospel is quite long, but it's a very meaningful passage about love, friendship and the power of God through His Son Jesus.

In Jesus time when someone died, because there was no form of refrigeration, it was important to bury the body quickly usually before sunset on the day of death.

Bodies were not embalmed but simply wrapped in linen and put into a burial vault.

So the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead was most significant because Jesus waited 2 days before setting off.

Why so, is the question we ask.

This was to be the last and greatest miracle performed by Jesus and He wanted to demonstrate the will of God in a powerful way and glorify God and Himself through this major miracle.

We heard him say earlier of Lazarus

“This sickness will end not in death but in God's glory and through it the Son of God will be glorified”

On arrival at the house of Lazarus, he was well aware that Lazarus was long dead. His first act was to pacify Martha with one of his most treasured teachings.

“I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die”

Martha immediately responded with her belief in the power of Jesus

Jesus thanks his Father for hearing his prayer even before Lazarus is recalled to life.

An important result of this miracle is that many of the Jews that had assembled at the home of Lazarus having seen what he did, believed in him.

Jesus knew that the other outcome would be a strengthening of the desire of the Chief Priests and Pharisees to put him to death, as some of the Jews reported the miracle to them.

After this Jesus went to Ephraim a town near the wilderness and remained with his Disciples until it was time to go to Jerusalem for the Passover.

Jesus previous miracles were mostly due to his compassion for those afflicted in many ways, some like feeding of the 3000, were compassionate for the welfare of others.

Today's miracle is all about love. Jesus loved Lazarus, Martha and Mary, and Jesus wept for love of them at the death of Lazarus.

Today Jesus weeps for many people, those caught up in war and famine, for children with severe medical problems, He weeps for the unwanted and unloved, and He weeps for us in all our troubles.

There are many examples of the love of God through Jesus in scripture and also in our lives.

There are many people entombed by the dark areas of their lives, through the chains of addiction to alcohol, drugs, sexual deviation, hatred and anger.

Jesus weeps and shares the pain in all of these circumstances.

Hurt and pain will always be a part of our lives, but we can be certain that God will not leave us to endure these alone. God is always with us.

Today's readings concern death but the message is that death should not be feared but should be prepared for, we should always be ready and we accomplish this by living good Christian lives.

With only a few weeks of lent to go, let us renew our efforts to make the best of the remaining time and take every opportunity to immerse ourselves in all aspects of this special time of grace.