

Homily for April 1, 2001
5th Sunday of Lent Cycle A (RCIA Option)

By Father Charles Bowes

Ezekiel 37:12-14
Romans 8:8-1
John 11:1-45

We, like Lazarus, are set free to free others too.

The story of the raising of Lazarus in John chapter 11 is not about Lazarus. After all he does not even have a speaking part, and appears only in the final lines of the passage at Jesus' command. The story is really about the disciples, about Martha and Mary, and about the crowd around the grieving sisters – the story is really about you and me. What do they, what do we really think about Jesus? What do we believe about his authority over life and death?

When the tomb is unsealed after four days – Lazarus is really dead! – there is prayer, then a loud cry of the dead man's name and the command to "come out." The dead man appears, but he cannot free himself. Jesus' instruction to the witnessing community is simple yet powerful: "Unbind him, let him go." Set him free; he cannot do it himself. Liberation of those bound by death is the community's mission – a community that lives in the spirit of the Risen Lord.

"Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die," says Jesus. "Do you believe this?" Jesus asks Martha. Jesus asks us – we will be asked that question at Easter with the renewal of our baptismal promises before we come forward to touch the water made holy by those who have been baptized and received into full communion. What do we really think about Jesus – what do we believe about his authority over life and death? Are we ready to respond affirmatively to the questions of our baptismal promises at Easter?

It is not an accident that the early baptismal fonts were shaped in the form of a sepulcher, a tomb – either a cross or octagonal in shape – the eighth day – the day of fulfillment. Those who are baptized go into the water as if into a tomb – burial and birth is the motif of Catholic baptism. Notice that in the baptisms we will do at Easter those being baptized enter from one side of the font but emerge moving toward the altar, toward the table, that is the journey of all of us at Easter – to the table either through the waters of rebirth or through the sacrament of Reconciliation – however we get here, to the table it will be because we have once again touched our baptismal promises in solidarity with those who are being baptized and being received into full communion. They need us and we need them so that we can be one at the table of the

Risen Lord. For those already baptized, our Lenten Reconciliation Service will be this coming Thursday at 7:30 p.m.

“Untie him. Let him go free,” these are the words we know our great God in Jesus speaks to us at Easter and at every Eucharist. In effect these words are said to us at every celebration of reconciliation.

While all three readings mean one thing, that the Lord is not a God of dead souls, of people enslaved, but of a living, active community of believers that lives for God, the Church is not fixated on the biblical past nor fixed on the future, glory in the life to come, important as that faith and hope is. Baptismal life, Christian life, is a matter of spirit *now*, of life *now*, God Father, Son and Holy Spirit dwelling in us from the day that living water first flowed upon our bodies. The tomb of Lazarus is not a place for any of us ever to reside – but a stepping stone to life everlasting – full life in which we touch the lives of others because we have been touched by the Risen Lord.

So let us pray: Lord, call us forth and help us rise from the grave of our sins. May we come willingly, no longer bound, but free in your Son’s spirit.

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are set free to free others too.