

Homily for March 17, 2002  
5th Sunday of Lent Cycle A

By Father Charles Bowes

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

## *Right this very moment God calls us forth from that which entombs us.*

The glorious story of the resuscitation of Lazarus in John, chapter 11, centers upon a single statement and question uttered by Jesus: "I am the resurrection and the life: whoever believes in me, though he should die, will come to life; and whoever is alive and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Jesus asks Martha.

These words addressed to Martha are really intended for all those who hear the conversation. These words are directed to us, right now. Furthermore, the command to the dead Lazarus, "Come out," - this command is directed to us right now. This belief in the power of the resurrected Christ and this command that we be free of what entombs us is not just a comforting thought, real but harmless that we carry in the back of our mind, intending to trot it out later when we really need it.

Rather, the question, "Do you believe this?" is put to us now before the tomb of our dreams - what lies buried within? What lies so out of reach, so past, so

absent, that it can never be reclaimed? Get in touch with that freedom so longed for and hear Jesus say to you and to me at our deepest level: "Come out...unbind them and set them free."

The setting free God intends is not necessarily dramatic. It can be but usually is not. Rather, the setting free consists in the sense of not being alone in our entombment, of knowing, believing that God's will for us is ultimately peace and fulfillment. Yet the point of contact with that saving faith is whatever entombs, whatever binds, whatever constricts. It is from there that we pray, from there that we ask the question: "Lord, what holds you back from freeing me? What will make sense of my death-like state, my worry, my care?" And in merely asking, in the questioning, in that moment and for perhaps but a moment, we listen, we are open, we sense we are not alone.

I guess my greatest sense of being bound and constrained is in the area of our future - the future of our Church in the light of the declining number of priests. I feel powerless over that as if only God can save me.

What is your source of being dead or bound up? What ties you up in knots, paralyzes? What is so dark that you dare not go there? Imagine it. Get in touch

with it – that paralyzing relationship, that worry, that fear, that habit – let it entomb and bind. Is it financial concerns, job related? Experience its stench, its foul odor, the sense of powerlessness, the immobilization. Sit with it and be unable to speak, so dead are we. And from that awful place hear the words placed on the lips of Jesus: “Come out...unbind and set them free.” Spend a moment in silence now and invite God to give life through Jesus by asking this question: “Lord, how did you come to know that God intends only life? Lord, help me name what makes me feel powerless and let me hear your voice which longs to set me free.”

May our “amen” at Holy Communion be our “yes” to faith in a God who is in charge now even of what is beyond our imagining.

Our elect for the sacraments of Easter continues to do us a marvelous service. We celebrate again, the Scrutinies – we do not scrutinize them. Rather, they have named what we all share in terms of entombment. We scrutinize ourselves and thereby invite God's healing and a heightened sense of our ability to hear the Lord say to each of us: “Come out – be set free.”

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