

**Homily for April 2, 2006
5th Sunday of Lent (Cycle A)**

By Father Charles Bowes

Ezekiel 37:12-14

Psalms 130:1-8

Romans 8:8-11

John 11:1-45

The one in whom we believe is our resurrection.

There are times in our lives when the Good News doesn't sound very good, does it? The day that the doctor calls you back for a second visit. The day that "I love you" is no longer enough. The day that the factory closes its doors and padlocks the gate. On these days, we find ourselves standing alone in the tomb. We are bound.

There are times in our lives when the Good News is easy to ignore. Times when it's simpler to say, "Gee I'm sorry" than to transform our lives. Times when it's safer to look away than to get involved. There are times when the passion that once propelled us - to fight against injustice, to speak the truth to power, to stand beside the forgotten and the poor - has long since cooled into a familiar prayer and a few good intentions. And suddenly, before we realize how it happened, we find ourselves shivering in the tomb. We are bound.

And, let's face it, there are times when the tomb can be downright comfortable. Nobody bothers you there. Nobody asks you questions or expects any answers. Nobody hands you an agenda or schedules you into meetings. Nobody makes dangerous demands or disturbs your peace. You never have to squint into the sun or see things you don't want to see. And if the

funeral bindings restrict your movement and freedom, well, those same bindings can also keep you safe and secure. And so, it's easy to awaken and find yourself bound in the tomb.

"Tied hand and foot with burial bands," says the Gospel. Yet Jesus still raised him up! Even when he was tied hand and foot, the dead man came out, so powerful is the voice of the Lord. The physical binding can be interpreted to reflect all manner of being bound: emotionally, spiritually, psychologically, etc. But do you notice that even though Jesus raised up Lazarus, others helped to free him? Jesus said to those around, "Untie him and let him go."

Human cooperation in bringing about the divine will is nothing new. It's just that we're not always very conscious of the fact that God expects us to act along with him. We do good, we act justly, and we live the faith. But we're not doing it alone. We're doing it with God.

Today's opening prayer begs God to change our selfishness into self-giving. In today's scrutiny, "We pray for these your servants, who eagerly approach the waters of new birth and hunger for the banquet of life. Do not let the power of death hold them back, for by their faith, they will share in the triumph of your resurrection."

Together with the Elect, we are called forth from our tombs! The Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us. We are no longer dry bones and

tomb dwellers. We rely on the help, the prayers of others. We need God even to accept the invitation of Christ: to come out, to go free, to live with the baptismal strength of the Spirit.

That is what Jesus calls us to. We are Lazarus. We are Mary. We are Martha. We are the bystanders at that tomb. We are weeping with Jesus. As Scripture scholar Sandra Schneiders says: "We are not asked not to weep; but only not to despair, for the one in whom we believe is our resurrection, because he is our life."

So let us pray: I cannot begin to imagine what you offer, or how, or why, my God. Your new creation is too wonderful, and I sometimes trim my hopes. Make my faith as bold as your Word; energize me with the Spirit you promise, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The one in whom we believe
is our resurrection.