

From the PA's Desk

Scripture Today:

In our Sunday liturgical readings, the first reading from the Old Testament always parallels what we hear complimented in the Gospels. So in today's first reading from Ezekiel, we hear the message preached to the Jews in Babylon who had been banished from their homeland, and it's the conclusion of Ezekiel's vision of the dry and dead bones, which at God's prophesy, come back to life. Just as God "breathed" life into the lifeless creatures of Adam and Eve, so will God breathe his spirit again into the "dry bones" of our lifeless bodies, and restore us to life again.

When I reflect back on my spiritual journey, I see how God has done this over and over in my life. So it is true for all of us. We might consider the times when we fought metaphorically the demons around us and within us, and were not destroyed; when we admitted a weakness and made progress; when we faced a crisis and discovered surprising strength; when we suffered through depression and emerged with a lighter spirit; when we confronted death and felt hope enkindled. Such experiences can be seen as examples of God breathing new life into our dead and dried old bones.

People tend to sometimes reach a point where despair takes over and depression reigns supreme. We sometimes feel overwhelmed by life's shocks and incapacitated by our own failures. Self-pity often becomes the expression of our profound misery. We feel we are old bones incapable of new life. Today's readings deal with the very real problems of anxiety and hopelessness. Yet they clearly announce a God who becomes involved in human tragedy. This is the God of the living who chooses to become concerned with anything that brings feelings of lifelessness, and what's to balance them with manifestations of new life. Our God unequivocally enables old bones to have new life. Hope then becomes possible and life becomes livable. The most healing power on earth appears when imperfect people, dismissing all signs to the contrary, know they have enormous power to bless this wounded world. It happens not when we have conquered our failures, but when we know those failures can't define us. What defines us is the answer to the question: In whose image and likeness do we see ourselves? It will always be a flawed, sometimes awkward, sometimes blundering image.

The rising of Lazarus plays like a rehearsal for the events next week's liturgies will celebrate. John points out that Lazarus is the brother of the Mary "who had anointed the lord with perfumed oil and dried his feet with her hair" (11:2). The odd thing about this is that even though John speaks of this event in the past tense, Mary doesn't anoint Jesus' feet and dry them with her hair until later in Chapter 12, after Lazarus has been raised from the dead! Without a doubt this is simply evidence of the editorial "cutting and pasting" of the texts that happened as John's Gospel came together in the first century.

I find it especially interesting that after Jesus hears of Lazarus' illness, Jesus decided to stay right where he was for two more days! Wouldn't we upon hearing of the illness of a dear friend start out immediately? What was Jesus waiting for? The stage was being set for an example of resurrection, which will introduce Jesus' own death to new life resurrection in a few weeks. When the disciples caution Jesus about going to the place where the Jewish leaders are, in fear that they might harm him, Jesus responds with an enigmatic saying about darkness and light. Once Jesus arrives on the scene, and after he explains that he is the resurrection and the life, he asks for directions to the tomb. Once he arrives at the tomb, the text says he became "perturbed and deeply troubled." The original Greek language doesn't say Jesus was "perturbed," but literally, that Jesus "snorted in spirit," which may mean that he was angry at the presence of evil or death itself.

At the end of the story, Jesus cries out "in a loud voice" for him to come out of the tomb. Lazarus does wrapped in his burial cloth, and Jesus ends the passage with words that you and I hear Jesus say to us throughout our lives, and especially upon our physical deaths: "Untie him and let him go."

While very few of us can heal the sick or bring the dead back to life as Jesus did, there are many situations in our lives into which we can bring forth healing and resurrection. We can bring forth resurrection by spending some time with a

child or an elderly relative or neighbor, by sharing what we have with someone in need, by taking the first step toward reconciliation with someone who has hurt us or by asking forgiveness of someone we have hurt. There are so many people who are awaiting resurrection – to rise from despair, cynicism and alienation to joy, hope and a sense of belonging. Such is the resurrection and healing that we can bring to our world, as we await the promise and reality of our own resurrections.

The Lord already knows who we are from the inside out, and he looks at you and me with the same love that he had for his dear friend Lazarus. He knows our successes and our triumphs, and he's proud of us. But God also sees what's dead in us, just as clearly as when he looked at Lazarus. He sees the parts of us that are locked up behind solid rock, as Lazarus was. He sees the parts of us that are tied up that we can't move. And God calls out to us by name, just as he called Lazarus. "Come out!" he says. "Don't stay in that place of death any longer. Come out into the fresh air and the light; be released from your bonds, whatever they are. Come out and live!" That is Jesus' call to each of us this day. "Leave behind what cannot give you life, and come into deeper friendship with those who can give you life, the Lord and the Church gather in his name. If we are to answer his call, we must name the parts of ourselves that are wounded or dead, imprisoned or in darkness, and give those parts of ourselves to him to be healed, resurrected, and set free. As one who has been discovering empty tombs all my life, I pray that you too will discover empty tombs your whole life through.

Alpha: No Meeting This Monday

We are not meeting Monday, April 3rd because it's spring break for Shepherd Schools. We will meet again on April 9th with the topic: **Why and How should I Pray?** There is however a group facilitator meeting next Monday at 6 pm in the hall.

Big Raffle Tickets:

Big Raffle tickets are available at the back of church. The Big Raffle is conducted by The Catholic Community Foundation of Mid-Michigan, and they promote many evangelization and educational programs around the Diocese of Saginaw. You can win many prizes, and please check out the banner in the back of church. Tickets are only \$5.00, and best of all, half the money for tickets we sell comes back to the parish. I've also asked the Catholic Community Foundation for a grant to help us pay for the Alpha meals, so please be generous!

Bishop Cistone's Mother's Day Visit:

As many of you know, when I was in my 20's I spent eight years in the seminary (Sacred Heart in Detroit and St. John's in Plymouth), during which I received a Master of Divinity degree, which is the degree one needs to be ordained to the priesthood. I got distracted from my real vocation for many reasons, but God has a way of bringing us to the point of realizing who we are at our deepest levels, often through many years of discernment and searching. I have worked in full-time parish ministry for the past 30 years, and I could never imagine myself doing anything but parish ministry. There is rarely a day that I'm not grateful for the life God has called me to.

A few years ago I entered into dialogue with some of the leadership in the Diocese of Saginaw, and in the past year I have had a series of private discussions with Bishop Cistone about ordination. On Mother's Day in May, he will join us here at the Sunday Mass to formally call me to Candidacy for Holy Orders, and his intention is to ordain me a deacon, with the eight married men who will be permanent deacons, on June 11th. After I begin serving as a deacon, he and I will continue our discussion about possible priesthood ordination in the future. I am grateful to the Lord, the Bishop, and a number of dedicated priests in the Diocese of Saginaw, who are with me on this journey, as I continue to discern God's will for my life. I'm also grateful to you as a parish for helping me confirm what my vocation really is. As they say, "better late than never!" Blessings to all of you, and I hope you can celebrate Mother's Day with me at Mass.