

Dominica V Quadragesimae A

Lectio Divina by Fr. Randy Soto

I. Lectio

A. Theme of the day: **Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of life**

1st Dry bones come back to life by the Spirit of YHWH

2nd The Holy Spirit lives within us

Gospel Lazarus comes back to life

B. Our first reading belongs to Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones. In this vision the bones are said to be the house of Israel (Eze 37:11) which had been deported to Babylon and had lost all hope in returning back to Mount Zion. The prophet is called by YHWH to instill onto his people a new "*Breath*" that would lift their decayed spirit and bring up their hope and their trust in God. In the midst of this grotesque scene in which life is absent, the "*Breath*" of God recreates humanity, like once he did in the beginning of time (Gen 2:7). In Ezekiel's oracle we read: "*when I open your graves and raise you from your grave, my people, and put my Spirit in you, and you revive, and I resettle you on your own soil*" (Eze 37:14).

C. God's promise of deliverance is received by the community as "*rain*" which quenches and soothes our dry weary land; Ps 130 expresses with magnanimity and thanksgiving: "*with the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.*"

D. St. Paul in his letter to the Romans reminds Christians of their very own *re-creation or re-generation* through the "*waters*" of Baptism. This "*water*" is a sacramental in the Church for it is used as a vehicle so that the *Holy Spirit* may come into ourselves in order to transform us in children of God: "*the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you;*" and by becoming thus, our bodies be prepared to the Resurrection in the likeness of Christ.

E. Lazarus' *re-animation* is the most spectacular sign Jesus ever performed. It is the last of the seven signs contained in the first part of John's Gospel. This sign as such is an anticipation of Jesus' own Resurrection. There are in the text parallels that allow us to connect both episodes: a) Both are really dead. Lazarus has been in the tomb more than four days, and Jesus is in his third; b) While Lazarus comes out wrapped in the burial clothes, Jesus resurrects freed from them; c) the evident contrast between Lazarus' reanimation to this life and Jesus' Resurrection to Eternal Life highlights this typological motif."

F. John's Christology continually points out the excellence of Christ, the Divine Logos Incarnate. The *egó eimí* or "I am" sayings are very recurrent in this Gospel. These are meant to declare loud and clear that Jesus is both Man and God and that he is the Saviour of all humanity. Our Gospel today is not the exception: "*I am the resurrection and the life.*" See Contemplatio.

III. *Meditatio*

A. We are getting closer to the Celebration of the Paschal Mystery. Today we reach a climactic point in our Lenten preparation: we are confronted with the Life-giving power of God. He is the "One Being," therefore, he is the only one capable of creating life out of nothing (Adam); of re-creating it out of the waters of the Flood (Noah); of re-animating it when our sins and the laws of nature have ended it (Ezekiel and Lazarus); ultimately he has the power to resurrect it to Eternal Life (Jesus).

B. This Life-giving power has been illustrated in the Sacred Pages with a plethora of metaphors. The most common ones are: Breath of Life, Spirit of God, water from above, Red Sea, Jordan River, column of fire, cloud, thunder, etc., etc.

C. Are we ready to witness the Life-giving power of God? Are we ready to receive from Jesus himself the gift of the Spirit on "the evening of that same Easter day"? Do we trust in him as to believe that he is our Resurrection, life and Truth?

III. *Oratio*

A. Because Lent is weighing on us we begin our celebration with Ps 43: "*Give me justice, O God, and defend my cause against the wicked; rescue me from deceitful and unjust men. You, O God, are my refuge*" (EA). We implore our Heavenly Father to be imitators of Christ in our love-giving: "*help us to be like Christ your Son, who loved the world and died for our salvation*" (OP); As we offer our gifts, we offer ourselves as an oblation and hope that God will purify us: "*may the sacrifice we offer take away the sins of those whom you enlighten with the Christian faith*" (PG). The mystery of Christ's Incarnation is finally solved: Being God he became Man in order to save us from sin and death: "*As a man like us, Jesus wept for Lazarus his friend. As the eternal God he raised Lazarus from the dead. In his love for us all, Christ gives us the sacraments to lift us up to everlasting life.*" (Preface). At communion while receiving the Eucharist we hear again the voice of Jesus reassuring us in our faith: "*He who lives and believes in me will not die for ever, said the Lord*" (CA). We conclude our celebration by asking God to help us imitate Jesus: "*by this sacrifice may we always remain one with your Son, Jesus Christ, whose body and blood we share*" (AC).

III. *Contemplatio*

A. *O Christ our God, Who by Thy voice didst release Lazarus from the bonds of death after four days in the tomb, restoring him again to life: Thyself. O Master, enliven us who are deadened by sins, granting life that none can take away; and make us who put our hope in Thee, heirs of life without end. For Thou art our Life and Resurrection, and to Thee belongeth glory: together with Thine immortal Father, and Thine All-holy, and Good, and Life-creating Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen* (Orthodox Prayer).

B. The following Homily serves as an excellent means of contemplation:

LAZARUS, COME OUT!

Homily 8 on Lazarus by Andrew of Crete, PG 97:980-981

LAZARUS, COME OUT!

It is the voice of the Lord, the proclamation of the king – an authoritative command.

COME OUT!

Leave corruption behind and receive the flesh of incorruption.

LAZARUS, COME OUT!

Let them know that the time has come when those in the tombs will hear the voice of the Son of Man. Once they have heard they will come alive.

COME OUT!

The stumbling block is taken away. Come to me – I am calling you.

[COME OUT!]

Covered with the burial cloth so that they won't think you were only pretending to be dead. Let them see your hands and feet bound and your face covered. Let them see if they still do not believe the miracle.

COME OUT!

Let the stench of your body prove the resurrection. Let the burial linen be undone so that they can recognize the one who was put in the tomb.

COME OUT!

Come alive and enliven! Come out of the tomb. Teach them how all creation will be enlivened in a moment when the trumpet's voice proclaims the resurrection of the dead.

COME OUT!

Let breath appear in your nostrils, let blood pulse through your veins, let the voice sound in your larynx, let the words fill your ears, let vision enlighten your eyes, let the sense of smell fill your senses, walk as nature intended as your earthly tent is enlivened by your soul.

COME OUT!

Leave behind the burial cloth and glorify the miracle. Leave the revolting stench of death and proclaim the strength of my power. I am calling you out!

COME OUT!

I who said, let there be light, let there be firmament. Amen

C. For those who are interested in the style of John, I have compiled all the "I am" sayings of his Gospel, Letters and Book of Revelation. In hopes that by knowing what those sayings mean we may grow in our understanding of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Let us contemplate, then, those "I am" sayings.

Ἐγώ εἰμι (I am)

1:20.23.26.27.30.21;

3:28; 4:14.26.32.38;

5:7.30.31.34.36.43.45;

6:20.35.40.41.48.51.63.70;

7:7.8.17.29.34.36;

8:11.12.14.15.16.18.21.22.23.24.28.29.38.

There are three basic types of sayings here relating to Jesus:

A) One set of sayings is metaphorical in which Jesus identifies himself in comparison to something else, usually in response to some action that he has performed. For example, "I am the bread of life" follows a feeding miracle. The

42.45.49.50.54.55.58;
9:9.39;
10:7.9.10.11.14.17.18.25.30.34; 11:25.27.
42;12:26.46.47.49.50;
13:7.14.15.18.19.26.33.36;
14:3.4.6.10.11.12.14.19.20.26.27.28;
15:1.5.10.14.16.19.20.26;
16:4.7.26.27.33;
17:4.9.12.14.16.19.23.24.25;
18:5.6.8.20.21.35.37.38;
19:6;21
2Jn 1;
3Jn 1;
Ap 1:8.9.17;
2:23;
3:9.19;
5:4;
17:7;
21:6;
22:13.16.18

implication here is that the actions of Jesus demonstrate who he is for those who are willing to believe (2:23, 7:31; 20:29).

B) A second type of saying is a self-identification formula, either Jesus identifying himself in response to someone's inquiry ("I am he"), or identifying himself in relation to God/Father ("I am in the Father").

C) The third type of saying lacks an object to the verb, leaving it as a simple statement of existence. This occurs in only one saying, 8:58. However, the form of the saying is interesting. We might expect this saying to be in a past tense if it were a simple statement of fact: "before Abraham was, I was." In order to understand this continuous imperfect action it must be read in light of the preexistence of the Logos presented in the Overture of the Gospel (1:1-18). But also we must go back to the OT, where the Holy Name of God was revealed: in Exodus 3 when Moses asked whom he should tell the people sent him to deliver them from Egypt, God revealed himself as "I am" or "I will be" (Ex 3: 14).

This Christological motif of the Gospel becomes even clearer when we read John's own stated purpose for writing the Gospel in 20:30-31: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." John is trying to present that Jesus' flesh is the New Temple, the place where God's glory dwells. To be with Jesus is to be with God.