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Fifth Sunday of Lent:

JESUS IS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

When somebody we love dies, it feels like our own heart has been broken, leaving us feeling as if life itself has come to an end. At this point, when we are consumed by sadness and sorrow for which there seems to be no relief, we experience so little consolation, simply because we feel so broken inside.

In the readings for this Fifth Sunday of Lent, we read about the death of Lazarus and of his being in the grave for four days. For the people of Jesus' day, death was the great finality, the end of all things. Nothing escapes or overcomes death. When Jesus is asked to come cure Lazarus, the Lord waits four days; and when he arrives, he finds the entire village weeping at the death of their friend and neighbor. Martha rebukes him. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

The detail that Lazarus had been dead four days by the time Jesus got there is meant to underscore that he was beyond any hope of being brought back to life. The rabbis believed that the soul hovered over the body for three days and after that, there was no hope of resuscitation. Even Martha, who came to confess that Jesus was the Christ, the "Son of God," didn't comprehend that Jesus could possibly help her brother. In the end, Jesus ignores the doubt, the unbelief, the criticism, and he goes on to raise Lazarus from the dead.

The readings of today express the reality of God's power to give life, even in the worst of circumstances. Lazarus is us – all of us – bound by death in our current lives, but called to life by Jesus who is the Light and the Life of the world. Jesus is always standing at the edge of our tombs, shouting "Come out!" Do we hear his command? And can we walk into the light of day, pulling free of our grave clothes as we go?



"The Raising of Lazarus" by Carl Heinrich Bloch (1834-1890).

No matter how hopeless we may find the situations we are in, God is willing and ready to unbind us if only we will believe in Jesus who *is* the resurrection and the life. For only God has the power to restore all the impossible losses in our lives, take away our grief, and bring us to endless joy. Let us ask God for forgiveness during this Lenten season and invite him into all our trials, that he may raise us and restore us to life with the fresh breath of his Spirit.

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