

Fifth Sunday of Lent, Year A

Sunday Church at Home

during the Covid-19 Crisis

Family and friends are invited to gather in a suitable space at home. Instrumental music may be played, or a hymn may be sung.

Leader: We gather here as the Church of Christ in our home. Unfortunately, we are not able to attend Mass in our parish church as we are all trying to limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus in our country. Let us be united in the spirit of Christ with the Church around the world, and celebrate our redemption in Christ's suffering, death and resurrection.

All stand and the lay leader makes the sign of the cross, saying:

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All reply: Amen

Leader: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

All reply: Blessed be God for ever

PENITENTIAL RITE

Leader: Gathered together in Christ,
let us ask for forgiveness with confidence,
for God is full of gentleness and compassion.

A pause for silent reflection follows.

All recite together:

I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault, therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

Leader: May almighty God have mercy on us,
forgive us our sins,
and bring us to everlasting life.

All reply: Amen

Leader: Let us pray:
Come to our aid, Lord God,
that we may walk courageously in that love
of which your Son gave proof
when he handed himself over to death
out of love for the world.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

All reply: Amen

All may be seated.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading: Ezekiel 37:12-14

Introduction to the reading: The prophet Ezekiel spoke to God's people during their exile in Babylon, six centuries before Christ. In today's passage, the prophet (using the image of death and resurrection) assures the people that God will one day bring them back to their homeland.

A reading from the first Book of Ezekiel

Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you home into the land of Israel And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; then you shall know that i, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done it, says the Lord.

The word of the Lord.

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 130

Let us now pray the Responsorial Psalm beginning and ending with the response:

R./ With the Lord there is mercy, in him is plentiful redemption.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord;
Lord, hear my voice!
O let your ears be attentive
to the sound of my pleading.

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?
But with you is found forgiveness,
that you may be revered.

I long for you, O Lord,
my soul longs for his word.
My soul hopes in the Lord
more than watchmen for daybreak.
More than watchmen for daybreak,
let Israel hope for the Lord.

For with the Lord there is mercy,
in him is plentiful redemption.
It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

R./ With the Lord there is mercy, in him is plentiful redemption.

Second Reading: Romans 8:8-11

Introduction to the reading: Paul's letter to the Romans is his most detailed and important theological work. Throughout the letter, he teaches that Jesus overcame sin and the effects of sin. In today's passage, Paul stresses that through the Spirit, this saving power of Jesus is present and active in Christians of all times and places.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Brothers and sisters: Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwell in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit who dwells in you.
The Word of the Lord.

Verse before the Gospel (cf. John 11:25a.26)

Glory and praise to you, O Christ. I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord; he who believes in me shall never die.

Glory and praise to you, O Christ.

Gospel: John 11:1-45

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

At that time: A certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent to him, saying "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples "Let us go into Judea again."

The disciples said to him "Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" Jesus answered "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if any one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." Thus he spoke, and then he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awake him out of sleep." The disciples said to him "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover. Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead; and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciple, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary sat in the house. Martha said to Jesus "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." Jesus said to her "Your brother will rise again. Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world."

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying quietly, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.

When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. Then Mary, when she came where Jesus was and saw him, fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled; and he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him! Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odour, for he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone.

And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you me always hear me, but I have said this on account of the people

standing by, that they may believe that you have sent me.” When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection on the Readings

The leader reads the text prepared by the priest and leads the sharing.

Homily prepared by Fr Tshepo Duik

“Lord, he whom you love is ill” - that was all Martha and Mary’s message to Jesus entailed. No invitation to come; no asking for prayers; no details on the state of Lazarus’ illness, no indication of its cause, its severity: Simply, “he whom you love is ill.” Before John tells us Jesus’ action, he notes foremost that “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.” This is the key to understanding this whole Gospel... love. Jesus loves Martha, Jesus loves Mary, and Jesus loves Lazarus.

In his First Letter, John tells us that “God is love, and he who abides in loves abides in God and God in him” (1 John 4:16). Love is what sums up the whole of our existence and the whole of Jesus’ mission. Jesus has come to bring the love of God to humanity and to help us understand that he has come to show forth that love in the ordinariness of our lives.

Perhaps, as we too are faced with a dire situation of the Coronavirus pandemic, we can learn from Martha and Mary to simply tell Jesus what our situation is: “Lord, the people whom you love are ill,” ill from the virus, ill from anxiety, ill from fear, ill from distress, ill from fear of the unknown, ill from feeling abandoned by God and the Church. As Jesus heard Martha and Mary, surely he will hear us as well.

I can imagine that after Martha and Mary sent for Jesus, they did not sit back and relax, waiting idly. They surely did their part too in caring for their ill brother, in praying for his recovery, in comforting each other, in showing compassion to their family members, friends and neighbours.

And this invites us to do the same too. Social distancing and self-isolation need not be selfish means of responding to the pandemic. Rather than being caught up in the panic-buying frenzy, in complaining that our Masses are suspended, and in not thinking of the next person, we should rather take the cue from Martha and Mary’s response to their distress.

I can imagine Martha – the active one – going about her household duties as well as reaching out to those who had come to sympathise with them. Perhaps it was her initiative too to send for Jesus.

I can also imagine Mary – the contemplative one – in prayer, and offering consoling words to her brother, family members, friends and neighbours.

I would like to suggest that the Coronavirus pandemic is perhaps an opportunity to evaluate our love of God and neighbour.

The spread of the virus and its devastating effects on healthcare, social interactions, and religious practice has rapidly changed our world. It is undeniable that it is an extraordinary challenge to us. This change has affected how we come together in worship in love of God and how we relate to each other in love of neighbour.

Social distancing, isolation and the lockdown are effective ways of slowing the spread of the virus. However, it is easy for us to become anxious, angry, disappointed and even hopeless as our bishops call us to adapt our liturgical practice to the current situation. As one person said to me recently, “I feel abandoned by the Church and deprived of Jesus in the Eucharist.” Many people feel like love of God is compromised, that our love of neighbour is over-emphasised to the expense of love of God. How do we balance the two?

Martha and Mary’s response is encouraging. It is honest, sincere and direct. It balances faith in Jesus with praxis, contemplation with action.

As I have already said, I believe that the Coronavirus pandemic is also an opportunity to evaluate our love of God and neighbour. Following medical and social science, the law of the land, the precepts of the Church, and the pronouncements of our bishops, how does the Church’s response (that is, your response, my response) fare in love of God and neighbour?

Jesus raising Lazarus from his tomb points to Jesus’ own death and Resurrection. John mentions some similarities: the burial cloths, the head covering, the detail about Mary anointing Jesus.

Faith is the key.

If we believe as Martha in today’s Gospel that Jesus is the resurrection and the life; if we follow Martha and Mary’s example of action and contemplation; if our prayers to Jesus are coupled with our personal acts of mercy, then we shall live.

Jesus is with us; he hears our call to him; he comes to meet us in our distress, as he did with Martha, Mary and Lazarus.

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- Martha and Mary’s message to Jesus is from the heart: “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” How is my prayer and communication with Jesus? Is it honest, sincere, from the heart?
- What is my response to the Coronavirus pandemic? Is it a balance of prayer and action?

Prayer: “Lord, the people whom you love are ill; come to our aid!”

Prayer of the Faithful

Leader: In humility and trust, let us turn to our compassionate Lord for our needs.

Reader: We pray for the Church: *(pause)*
that the Lord may be a guiding and protective presence to her ministers as they bring God's word of hope and consolation to His people during the nationwide lockdown.
LORD, HEAR US.

We pray for those who do not believe in God or in the possibility of life beyond this life: *(pause)*
that they may come to experience God's love for them and the greatness to which God calls us all.
LORD HEAR US

We pray for healthcare workers: *(pause)*
that our doctors, nurses, researchers, scientists, chaplains, and auxiliary staff may know our gratitude for their work, as well as the Lord's peace and protection.
LORD, HEAR US.

We pray for our leaders in governance and healthcare: *(pause)*
that the Lord may give them wisdom in making the right decisions for the well-being of all people.
LORD, HEAR US.

We pray for ourselves: *(pause)*
that God may fill us with compassion and concern for others, young and old, and that we may not forget the needy in these challenging days.
LORD, HEAR US.

We ask for the intercession of Our Lady, Health of the Sick: *(pause)*
that she may obtain for us, through her intercession – confident trust in the Lord; that our anxieties may be soothed and our faith strengthened.
LORD, HEAR US.

We pray for deceased members of our families and friends whose anniversaries occur about this time, *(pause for silent prayer)*

(For Bryanston Catholic Church: Manuel Jardim, Mr. and Mrs. Barone, Jean Dodds, Marcus, Belinda, Oliver and Carol Phillips, and Tereza Carreira.)
LORD HEAR US

We pray for all who died during the week.
Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord.

All: And let perpetual light shine on them.
May they rest in peace. Amen.

Leader: Let us pray our prayer for healing:

All pray: Lord Jesus Christ,
you travelled through towns and villages “curing every disease and illness.” Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus, that we may experience your healing love. Heal those who are sick with the virus. May they regain their strength and health through quality medical care. Heal us from our fear, which prevents nations from working together and neighbours from helping one another. Lord Jesus Christ, healer of all, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow. Be with those who have died from the virus. May they be at rest with you in your eternal peace. Be with the families of those who are sick or have died. As they worry and grieve, defend them from illness and despair. Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected and who put themselves at risk in the process. Be with the leaders of all nations. Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the well-being of the people they are meant to serve. Whether we are home or abroad, surrounded by many people suffering from this illness or only a few, Jesus Christ, stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare. In place of our anxiety, give us your peace. Lord Jesus Christ, heal us. Amen.

Spiritual Communion

During the nationwide lockdown, the list of cancelled events includes weekday and Sunday Masses. No Mass means no Eucharist. Jesus gave us his Body and Blood on the cross and instituted the memorial of this great sacrifice at the Last Supper. “Do this in memory of me,” he told us. And so we do at every Mass. It is only during the Mass at the consecration that the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Thus, cancelling Masses is monumental. We can still unite ourselves to the Eucharist through making a spiritual Communion.

By making an Act of Spiritual Communion, we express our faith in Christ’s Real Presence in the Eucharist and ask him to unite himself with us. Here is the Act of Spiritual Communion written by St. Alphonsus de Liguori:

**My Jesus,
I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.
I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul.
Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart.
I embrace You as if You were already there
and unite myself wholly to You.
Never permit me to be separated from You.
Amen.**

CONCLUDING RITE

Leader: Let us pray to the Father in the words Jesus our Saviour gave us:

All say: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Leader: LORD JESUS CHRIST, by your passion, death and resurrection you have set us free from sin and death. May your grace renew our hearts this Lent and help us turn from sin in our own lives. May we learn to appreciate more deeply the sacrifice you made for us. Accept our prayer, fasting and acts of charity as we seek to draw closer to you during this holy season. Strengthen the faith of your people so that we may be a sign of your love to all the world. We ask this through Jesus Christ Our Lord. AMEN.

Blessing

A leader who is a layperson, using no gesture, says:

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.

Instrumental music may be played or a hymn may be sung.

