

A HOMILY FROM FR. FRANCIS ON THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT
**The Power of Raising the Dead: A Case for Believing in Jesus as
our Messiah and our Hope**

Dear brothers and sisters, this Sunday, as you know, is the last Sunday before we enter into the Holy Week leading up to the Easter of the resurrection of our Lord. How so *ad rem* that the readings of Year A Cycle which we are using this Sunday unanimously speak about raising of the dead to life. In the first reading for instance, we have, “Thus says the Lord GOD. O’ my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them, and bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD”(Ezekiel 37:12). This prophecy given through the priest Ezekiel who became the first prophet to be called to the prophetic mission outside Jerusalem came during a challenging historical context. The surviving tribe of Judah has been exiled to Babylon in 597 BC. Five years later, while in the land of exile, the Lord showed Ezekiel a vision of a broad valley filled with dry bones and commanded him to prophesy to those bones. The mystery here is that those bones symbolized the people of God. As Ezekiel prophesied to the bones, they came alive, breath entered into them. This typologically points to the gospel in which the Lord spoke words of life to Lazarus a man who had been dead for four days and he came back to life.

The second reading in harmony with the rest says, “If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit dwelling in you” (Romans 8:11). Our Lord tells us how this will happen, “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die”(John 11:25-26).

The raising of Lazarus from death, which we read today in the gospel passage is the seventh and the climax of the seven signs in the gospel of John. It points to our Lord as the Lord of life. All the signs together have one purpose and that is to teach that Jesus is the son of God and thus inspire faith in him. Speaking to the Apostles in this vein, our Lord said, "Lazarus has died. And I am glad for you that I was not there, that you may believe"(John 11:14-15). Our Lord emphasized the importance of believing in him many other times in this passage, “Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?”(John 11:40).

The salient message of this passage came to light when our Lord saw Mary and the rest of the relatives of Lazarus weeping. He himself wept yet he raised Lazarus from death to life. Why did he weep when he knew that he would raise him to life? Nothing God does is accidental. The tears of Jesus in this case

revealed not only his humanity, but symbolized his compassion for the human race that led him to bring us to new life. This is just as our Lord wept and brought Lazarus back to life. The raising of Lazarus from death is altogether a fulfilment of the prophecy in the first reading, an anticipation of the Lord's own resurrection and a serious case for believing in Jesus as the Messiah of God.

The civil authority knew what would be the consequence of this miracle and they dreaded it. What came out of their mouth was quite eye opening, "If we leave him alone, all will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our land and our nation" (John 11:48). Since this is the last sign revealing the identity of Jesus as the Messiah, who came into the world, it became the last straw that broke the camel's back. Once it happened, the mission of Jesus moved from the signs to the reality. The authority determined that he would die to save the Jewish nation but unbeknownst to them he came for all of humanity. Intriguingly, from the mouth of Caiphas, the high priest that year came this prophecy, "You know nothing, nor do you consider that it is better for you that one man should die instead of the people, so that the whole nation may not perish"(John 11:49-50). The death of our Lord, of course, was not only for one nation but for all nations. The Word of God speaks of it thus, it is to gather into one the dispersed children of God. This comes with a price. "So from that day on they planned to kill him" (John 11:52-53).

The quick succession of the events that followed after this episode said it all. These included the anointing of the Lord at dinner in Bethany at the house of Lazarus, Mary and Martha, his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem and being approached by the Greeks. One of these deserves special mention. A contingent of Greeks came seeking to speak with the Lord. The Greeks represent the quintessence of the gentile nations indicating that our Lord came truly for all nations. Hence, responding to the request from the Greeks relayed through Andrew and Phillip, our Lord said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit" (John 11:23-24).

Explaining the deeper significance of this, our Lord said, "Now is the time of judgment on this world now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself" (John 12:31-32). The lifting up of the Lord as the gospel indicated referred to our Lord's crucifixion on the cross and his ascension to the Father. How this

applies to us today was clearly stated by our holy Mother the Church as follows:

Christ will raise us up "on the last day"; but it is also true that, in a certain way, we have already risen with Christ. For, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, Christian life is already now on earth a participation in the death and Resurrection of Christ: You were buried with him in Baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God (CCC 1002).

When you are tempted to despair of your eternal because of your own inadequacy and sins remember what God promised those who believe in him, "I will sprinkle clean water over you to make you clean; from all your impurities and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36: 25-26). Dear brothers and sisters, the Lord deserves our trust. Like St Peter and other faithful disciples, may we say to him, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life (John 6:.68).