

Fifth Sunday in Lent 2020 (March 29)

Year A RCL

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

“O Lord God, you know.”

By: The Rev. Fr. Fabian Villalobos

From my knowledge, following the Second World War (WWII), there has not been another moment in our modern history where all the world looks mutually in despair and questions its present and future like in the days we live right now.

The COVID-19 pandemic affects all levels of society and has forced us to adapt rapidly to a new reality like social distancing, wearing masks, gloves, and constantly washing or sanitizing our hands. We especially learned quickly that this disease makes no distinction on age, social or economic condition, and each time we turn, it seems that we are learning something new about this coronavirus.

When we read this event in which we are living through biblical lenses, we discover an easy connection between our hospitals and civil authorities obligated to create or extend mortuary facilities to contain the bodies of many who are dying around us and around the world. This scene of desolation and

death is described in the valley of dry bones in the first lesson from the book of Ezekiel.

These bones and these bodies are only part of the material world that need the Spirit of Life to become fully human and to live. The complement between material and spiritual realities is important because it reminds us that we may control or manage a disease, but not for that do we have power over life.

As faithful believers in God, we are learning today to answer with the humility of Ezekiel. In the same way he answered when he received the question found in verse 3 of today's first lesson, "He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Ezekiel 37:3

Only God truly knows; it is part of His being, and all knowledge and answers are found only in God. If the bones can live or if our pandemic is going to take this or that direction, only God knows. A few months ago, no one imagined the situation in which we are living today.

What we can determine from this reading from the Old Testament applies the same for today's pandemic. "O Lord God, you know." So, for our consolation, it is better to trust the power of God and His capacity to control all human life knowing that as Creator and Maker of humankind, God is the owner of life and we are the stewards. Each one of us are responsible for our own life first, and

then for our family and those around us, and so far, until we understand that in the human family, we all are called to care for each other as members of the same body.

Something positive right now is to discover how connected we are as a human family; how much we have in common; and how we are calling collectively upon God in this time of distress.

The valley of bones, the illness of Lazarus, and the coronavirus pandemic in which we live right now are not new tragedies. When we read the Bible, it is possible to verify narratives of pains and adversities in people, communities, or territories that show the constant fragility of our human condition. The presence of adversity is not the point rather the position we take in front of it.

Take for example from the first lesson in verse 11, the feelings expressed as a community, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost”. Ezekiel 37:11 Or the feelings of Lazarus’ sisters Martha and Mary in today’s Gospel verses 21 and 32, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” John 11:21;32

It is normal to feel overwhelmed, devastated, abandoned and sad to claim the nonsense in front of calamity, especially for those that ignore God’s power and authority. As Christians, we are instead called to ponder everything in God’s

love. Even if that love includes going to Calvary and dying for others on the cross in obedience to the Father just as Jesus did. Or for like the many doctors, health workers and first responders across the world that right now are sacrificing their lives and families for the sake of others.

In seeing them and all who are diligently doing what they can to alleviate the consequences of this pandemic is clearly conceivable to understand that God is working through them and in them. It is only through this compassion and love for others that we show the way we care for them.

In reading the Gospel, we receive a testimony of this human compassion in front of death and sorrow from the way how Jesus reacts when he experiences the mourning of the grieving sisters of Lazarus. “When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.” John 11:33

Jesus and God the Father suffer with us. Jesus’ human pain is like ours to the point of being expressed in tears and weeping. I believe it is important to mention the closeness of God to human pain. God is crying and mourning with the many families today that are crying in front of the tombs of loved ones.

Is there in front of death, where as children of God, we proclaim in Him who is our hope: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even

though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” John 11: 25-26

Jesus’ delay to visit his friend Lazarus proves that He has the power not only to heal all from disease, but also to raise us from the dead. This power over death is the same power we hear in our first lesson from the book of Ezekiel, “And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live.” Ezekiel 37:13-14

Today more than never, we need to be reassured of God’s power over death, tombs, pandemics, our fears, and everything that represent an obstacle to the whole human race. The voice of God “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness” in Genesis 1:26-28, is the same power in the voice of Jesus, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out.” John 11:43-44

No matter how difficult the hardships and adversities we face are, God promises to be with us always, and He is faithful to His promises. As baptized members of His body the church, it is important to obey and trust, living our days with faith while answering to our many uncertainties just as Ezekiel did “O Lord God, you know.” Ezekiel 37:11 Amen.