

**Homily**  
**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent – A**

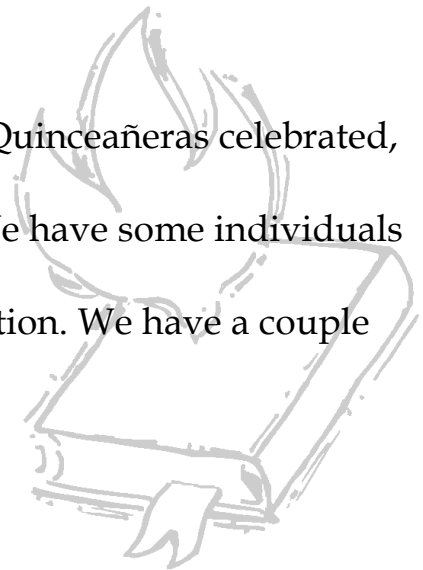
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski  
March 25-26, 2023

Ez 37: 12-14  
Ps 130: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8  
Rm 8: 8-11  
Jn 11: 1-45

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Normally each year on the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sunday of Lent, when we have individuals involved with the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA), during these three Sunday liturgies we focus on these three specific readings every year: the Woman at the Well (John 4: 4-42), the Man Born Blind (John 9: 1-38), and the Raising of Lazarus (John 11: 1-44). I feel blessed that David Surprenant and Ana Rivas have invited so many individuals from our parish to receive the sacraments on the Easter weekend, both at St. Anne's Church and at St. Patrick's (we have more receiving sacraments than those parishes with two or three thousand families!!!).

We have taught students who wish to have Quinceañeras celebrated, for which Confirmation must take place first. We have some individuals who wish to complete their sacraments of initiation. We have a couple



of good souls who are going to be married later this year as well as those who have been away from the church for a while and want to come back.

To prepare these individuals for the Easter Sacraments, the Church assigned three of the seven miracle stories presented in the Gospel of John; the first part of John's gospel which contain these miracles is entitled, "The Book of Signs," miracles and sayings of our Lord who reveals to us who He is, what He can do and what we need to do in order to spend the rest of our existence with Him and His Father in heaven.

Today's miracle about the Raising of Lazarus is the last of these seven miracles in the gospel of John:

1. Changing the Water into Wine (2:1-11)
2. Healing of the Nobleman's Son (4:46-54)
3. Healing at the Pool of Bethesda (5:1-9)
4. Feeding the Multitude (6:1-14)
5. Walking on the Water (6:15-25)
6. Healing of the Man Born Blind (9: 1-38)
7. The Raising of Lazarus (11: 1-44)

In John's gospel, this act of raising Lazarus from the dead was the last straw for the Jewish leaders who subsequently devoted themselves in earnest to murder our God.

After the Prologue from John (1: 1-18) and Jesus' introduction to this story of faith, we begin Jesus' public ministry with Him in the temple area, chasing out those who are selling animals – this is unique because in the other three gospels, the writers place this story as the “last straw” for some Jewish leaders to conspire to kill our Lord; in the gospel of John, this story is placed at the near beginning of the text. The theme from this story is clear - if the leaders tried to destroy the temple of Jesus' body, God would rebuild or resurrect that body three days.

In today's society, we do not often focus on our bodies as temples; how we treat our bodies and what we do with them violates in so many ways the laws that God has established for us. In this society, so many do with their bodies what feel good, what is considered right for them as opposed as sacred to God. We often abuse the temples of our body for hedonistic desires, such as sex outside of marriage, with drugs, with

an abuse of alcohol or gambling or with whatever other pleasures the body enjoys. Society often tells us that the body wants what it wants and that bodily pleasure is going to give us happiness.

In reality, we learn just the opposite, that the more we are consumed by sin, the more that our bodies are controlled by the evils that we have fed them and that this obsessive behavior becomes obsessive and destructive, both for ourselves and for our society at large. Yet, society often encourages us to abuse our bodies because that temporary satisfaction of self benefits others' wallets and purses while the body becomes a slave to those desires that get out of control.

What we learn from the scripture readings from the last three weeks is that God can offer the same satisfaction for the bodies – God can quench our thirst and heals our wounds or even raise us from the dead so that we can continue to live on earth. In John's gospel, Jesus continues to preach about something much more important, infinitely more important than the desires that chain us down in the world in which we live. The Son can do these things on earth but has been sent

by the Father to get us to heaven by showing us a path and a joy that the sensual desires can never sustain. We think bodily pleasures can be sustained but eventually we die and those pleasures die with us. What God offers us is a type of joy that remains with us for the rest of our existence by getting to the other side of life in an existence where there is no more suffering, no more tears and no more sadness.

What the Church teaches us in our first reading and our gospel today is that the true gift is life is preventing what scholars call “the death of the soul,” that second death that results from a life devoid of the Lord’s grace. With that living soul, with that contrite heart, with God leading us instead of the hate and desires that fill this world, is that a temple that proves itself worthy to house this Holy Spirit will be reunited to be with God on the last day, that this Spirit embraced and loved by faithful temples that care will remain with that temple *por los siglos de los siglos*.

Unfortunately, our society in general does not care about the other side of life. Our society wants what it wants in this world and does not really care about what exists on the other side because if they did, then

they would be coming to Mass and following what God is teaching us to do rather than following a society that eventually will crumble upon itself, as every government has done in the history of governments.

What we need to teach our RCIA friends is if God were walking the earth today as He did 2000 years ago, I suspect that God would be crucified or cancelled just as quickly now as he was then. In Matthew, Mark & Luke, Jesus' ministry only lasted apparently one year; in John's gospel, Jesus' ministry appears to have lasted three. This was not his world; this *is* not his world. The world at large does not want him; the world wants what it wants.

In today's gospel of the Raising of Lazarus, we are taught eventually that Lazarus will die on earth as we all do; the raising of the human body was not the point, in a sense. What *was* the point is that God can do anything, including getting us to the other side of life. By raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus showed us that God can make the impossible possible. When some in the secular world think that at the end of our life all things end, God teaches us that the impossible is made

possible through him and if we follow his teachings and are fed by his body and blood, we are lead to the path of eternal life.

If we understand the meaning of these three gospels on which we have focused these last three weeks, then we also understand what we need to do and what we need to teach. For this reason, our society wants to draw people further away from God so that they can tempt the body to be consumed by hedonistic desires of life. For those who respect the body as a temple of the Spirit, we learn about our true destiny and purpose in life. This is what we try to teach those in the RCIA process – that these men and women are not alone, that the Church is with them, that God is with them, that the people of faith are with them, that we pray for them.

We pray not just for them – we pray *for you*. Every single time we pray, we gather with the communion of saints (whether we know it or not). Every time we pray the liturgy of the hours, every time we celebrate a sacrament, God is with us and so is the communion of saints and the faithful of the Church, both in heaven and on earth. We learn

that we are not alone. We learn that if we have that faith, then on the last day we will be all together and there will be hope.

What we try to teach those in RCIA is that faith, hope and love requires a type of perseverance on our part to realize that we need to stay true to God. We need to have hope and what Jesus is about to offer us. Even when life seems hopeless, even when society tempts you to turn away from the gospel and believe in sin, God tells us to do the opposite - to turn away from sin and believe in the gospel.

With God, all things are possible. That is why we are here today. Even in these small little parishes of no great esteem, God is with us, and God will never abandon us. God will never abandon you. That is why I should be here; that is why you should be here.

Please know in this journey of faith, even after the RCIA classes are over, we continue to pray for you and we continue to love you in God's name. We continue to teach you that what society says is impossible, God says is very possible because God created you and God wants you to be with God for the rest of your existence.



Please know that we will do what we can to keep praying for you, even if you are not praying with us. We will pray for the lost; we will pray for the needy. We will pray for the orphan, the widow, the marginalized, the castigated. We will pray for all people in need of God's mercy because as God showed love to Samaritan women and those who are blind, for those who are sick and for those who have died like Lazarus in today's gospel, our Lord cries for you and we cry for you. Our Lord loves you and we must love you in God's name as well. Please do the same for the people that you and I meet. This is our prayer.