

Sunday Connection



Fifth Sunday of Lent, Cycle A

Sunday, March 29, 2020

Readings & Background

This Sunday's Reading

First Reading

Ezekiel 37:12-14

God will open the graves and restore the people of Israel.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 130:1-8

With the Lord is forgiveness and mercy.

Second Reading

Romans 8:8-11

The Spirit of God dwells in you.

Gospel Reading

John 11:1-45 (shorter version John 11:3-7,17,20-27,33b-45)

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

Background on the Gospel Reading

Our Gospel on this day, the fifth Sunday of Lent, is again taken from the Gospel according to John. The reading from John continues the break from Cycle A's focus on the Gospel of Matthew. Today's Gospel reading recounts another sign, or miracle, found in John's Gospel, the raising of Lazarus. As our catechumens move closer to the celebration of their Baptisms at the Triduum, today's reading invites us to reflect upon what it means to call Jesus the Resurrection and the life.

The context for the story of the raising of Lazarus is the Jewish leaders' growing animosity toward Jesus. Jesus has been in Jerusalem, taking part in the feast of the Dedication, which we have come to know as Hanukkah. The people have been pressing him to declare plainly whether he is the Messiah. Jesus tells them to look to his works, which testify to his coming from God. Many do not believe Jesus, however, and some try to stone him for blasphemy.

Into this scene of confrontation, Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, send word to Jesus that his friend is ill. Jesus is said to love Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, but he delays his journey for two days. The delay heightens the drama and shows Jesus' obedience to God, who is to be glorified through Lazarus's resurrection. When Jesus finally declares that he will journey to Bethany, his disciples fear for his life. Thomas declares that he and the other disciples should prepare to die with Jesus.

The scene described at Bethany is a sad one. Martha meets Jesus weeping and saying that if Jesus had been there, Lazarus would not have died. Yet she remains confident that God will do whatever Jesus asks. Martha affirms her belief that there will be a resurrection of the dead in the last days. Then Martha's sister, Mary, comes to Jesus with the same confidence, saying that Jesus could have cured Lazarus. Jesus asks to be brought to Lazarus's tomb where he prays and calls Lazarus out from the tomb. At this sign, many come to believe in Jesus, but others take word of the miracle to the Jewish authorities, who begin their plans for Jesus' death.

Set against the backdrop of Jesus' impending death, many elements of the raising of Lazarus foreshadow the good news of Jesus' own Resurrection. Jesus, facing the conflict with the Jewish authorities, acts in complete obedience to God. In raising Lazarus, Jesus shows his power over death so that when Jesus dies, those who believe in him might remember that and take hope. Just as Jesus calls for the stone to be rolled away from Lazarus's tomb, so too will the disciples find the stone rolled away from Jesus' tomb.

With our catechumens preparing for their Baptism at Easter, the Gospel today calls us to reflect on Baptism as a dying and rising with Jesus. In Baptism we die to sin's power over us, rising as children of God. In Baptism we join ourselves with Christ, who conquered death once and for all so that we who believe in him may have eternal life. With Martha and Mary, we are called to profess our belief that Jesus is indeed the Resurrection and the life.

Grades 1-3

Gospel Reading

John 11:1-45 (shorter version John 11:3-7,17,20-27,33b-45)

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

Making the Connection (Grades 1, 2, and 3)

Children at this age are learning that we show others who we are through our words and actions. In raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus showed his power over death as the Son of God. Through his Death and Resurrection, he has given us eternal life.

Materials Needed

- Sheet of poster board or construction paper with the words "Who are you?" written on it

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Show the poster. Ask: *What is the question on the poster?* (Who are you?) Say: *Who am I? One way I would answer that question is by saying, "I'm a friend." I show I am a friend by listening, being respectful, and doing fun things with others.*
2. Point to the words on the poster and invite children to answer the question Who are you? by telling something about themselves, such as "a student, a Christian, a helper, a soccer player." After each child

responds, ask: *How do you show you're a _____?* (Accept reasonable responses.) Say: *In today's Gospel, we will hear what happened when Jesus visited his friend Lazarus. Jesus performs a miracle. By doing this, he showed everyone who he is—the Son of God, our Lord and Savior, who gives us eternal life. Listen carefully to hear what miracle Jesus performed.*

3. Read aloud the shorter version of today's Gospel, John 11:3–7,17,20–27,33b–45.
4. Say: *Lazarus had died, but Jesus performed a miracle.* Ask: *What did Jesus do?* (He brought Lazarus back to life.) Say: *Jesus showed that he has power over death. When we believe in him, as Mary and Martha did, he gives us eternal life in heaven with God.*
5. Close by praying together the Glory Be to the Father.

Grades 4–6

Gospel Reading

John 11:1–45 (shorter version John 11:3–7,17,20–27,33b–45)

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

Making the Connection (Grades 4, 5, and 6)

In Jesus' conversation with Martha, Martha tells him that she believes in resurrection. Her response shows great faith, affirming her belief in eternal life and Jesus' connection to this promised salvation. We too make this profession of faith every Sunday when we pray the Nicene Creed.

Materials Needed

- Copies of the Nicene Creed (one for each child)
- Highlighters

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Distribute a copy of the Nicene Creed to each child. Invite volunteers to read aloud different parts of the Creed. Ask: *Is this prayer familiar to you? When have you heard this prayer prayed?* (at Mass) Say: *This prayer is called the Nicene Creed. We pray it at each Sunday Mass. It's a summary of what we believe as Christians. When we pray the Creed with the Church community, we are affirming our commitment to the beliefs stated in it.*
2. Distribute the highlighters. Instruct the children to highlight the parts of the Creed that present what we believe about Jesus' own death and what happens after death. Help the group identify the following phrases: "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end," "I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come," and "For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate . . ."
3. Say: *In today's Gospel, we will hear what Jesus taught about Resurrection, and we will hear about when Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead.*
4. Invite several volunteers to read today's Gospel, John 11:1–45.
5. Ask: *What belief did you hear about in today's Gospel that is also found in the Nicene Creed?* (Resurrection) *What do you think it means to say that Jesus is the Resurrection and the life?* (Accept all reasonable answers.)
6. Say: *When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he showed his power over death. We believe that by Jesus' death and Resurrection, he conquered death and won eternal life for us. Our faith tells us that those who are like Martha and Mary—people who believe that Jesus is the Resurrection and the life—will find*

eternal life.

7. Pray together that we will share Martha and Mary's faith that Jesus is the Resurrection and the life.
Conclude by praying together the Nicene Creed.

Grades 7-8

Gospel Reading

John 11:1-45 (shorter version John 11:3-7,17,20-27,33b-45)

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

Making the Connection (Grades 7 and 8)

Young people can be skeptical and no doubt relate to the notion of someone being raised from the dead as something that is "too good to be true." This Sunday's Gospel tells us that Jesus does indeed have power over death.

Materials Needed

- None

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Describe how tabloid newspapers have headlines that proclaim something that is too good to be true, such as "Doctors Discover Immortality Pill" or "New Diet Reduces Weight by Breathing."
2. Arrange the young people in pairs. Encourage them to come up with several examples of tabloid headlines that sound too good to be true.
3. Invite volunteers to share their examples.
4. Explain that in this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus performs a miracle that seems too good to be true.
5. Invite several volunteers to read today's Gospel, John 11:1-45.
6. Ask: *What is it that happened in this Sunday's Gospel that seems too good to be true? (Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.) How did people react to this miracle? (Many people began to believe in him.)*
7. Explain that this Gospel invites us to believe more deeply in Jesus, who truly has power over death.
8. Say: *When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he showed his power over death. We believe that by Jesus' death and Resurrection, he conquered death and won eternal life for us. Our faith tells us that those who are like Martha and Mary—people who believe that Jesus is the Resurrection and the life—will find eternal life.*
9. Pray together that we will share Martha and Mary's faith that Jesus is the Resurrection and the life.
Conclude by praying together the Nicene Creed.

Family

Gospel Reading

John 11:1-45 (shorter version John 11:3-7,17,20-27,33b-45)

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

Family Connection

Jesus' promise of eternal life is a central element of our Catholic faith. Even though Easter is still two weeks away, our Gospel today invites us to acknowledge Jesus' power over death, evidenced in the raising of Lazarus, and to anticipate Jesus' conquering of death once and for all in his death and Resurrection. We sometimes use examples from nature to help describe this mystery of our faith. Jesus himself talked about the seed that dies when planted in the ground in order to produce new life (John 12:24). Using that image and others, we find hope and confidence in Jesus, the Resurrection and the life.

Gather your family today and read today's Gospel in its shorter form, John 11:3-7,17,20-27,33b-45. Write Jesus' promise from today's Gospel ("I am the resurrection and the life.") on a large sheet of white paper. As your family talks about what Jesus means by this promise, decorate Jesus' words with symbols that will remind you of his promise of eternal life. Display this reminder of Jesus' promise in a prominent place in your home and keep it there until Easter. Pray that you will always remain confident in Jesus' promise of eternal life. Conclude by praying together the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed.