

The Word of God This Week

Set time aside each day this week with other members of your household, with other members of your parish or alone to listen to and reflect on the living Word of God. Use these passages from the Lectionary that are assigned for Liturgy this week. Reflect on how the Lord is inviting you to a deeper union with him.

TODAY

Ezekiel 37:12–14
Romans 8:8–11
John 11:1–45

MONDAY

John 8:1–11
"Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

TUESDAY

John 8:21–30
"I am not of this world."

WEDNESDAY

John 31–42
"... everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin."

THURSDAY

John 8:51–59
"... whoever keeps my word will never see death."

FRIDAY

John 10:31–42
"... the Father is in me and I am in the Father."

SATURDAY

John 11:45–56
"Many... who... had seen what Jesus did, believed in him."

Lazarus: Real Loss, True Faith, Genuine Hope

The mystery of death looms like an ever-present shadow over our lives. The story of Lazarus, the subject of today's Gospel passage, invites us to a deep reflection on the reality of death and, even more, our victory over death in Jesus Christ.

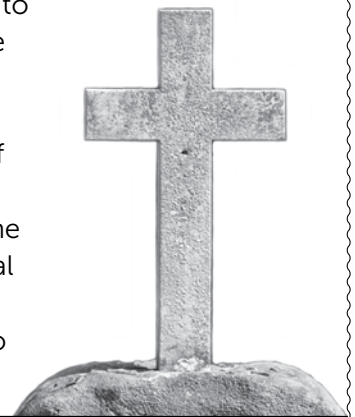
Today, many people prefer to call funerals celebrations of life. Perhaps this is a denial of the sting of death and a way of buffering ourselves against our losses. In contrast, today's Gospel starkly and honestly faces the reality of death as loss. Jesus himself weeps over the death of his friend Lazarus. And the sisters of Lazarus are immersed in grief.

The emotions associated with loss, however, give way to a summons of faith. Jesus proclaims himself to be "the resurrection and the life." At the tomb, he is in absolute union with the Father, source of all life. In their grief and not apart from it, Jesus calls Mary

and Martha to faith. "Do you believe?" he asks them and us. He offers them not an answer to the riddle of death but himself as the source of life. They do believe.

Jesus calls Lazarus from the tomb, and he comes forth. Jesus restores him to his loved ones. And here there is a subtle distinction. Lazarus comes back from the dead, but he does not yet share the power of the Risen Lord and an utterly new and transformed life.

His restoration to life is a genuine seed of hope pointing to the Resurrection of the Lord that is to come and the new and eternal life that Christ gives to all who believe in him.



The Faith of the Church

Death has a natural aspect. It is the end and conclusion of a life that we know is finite. At the same time, in faith, we understand that death is related to sin which has entered the human condition. The wrenching quality of death, untimely death, violent death—these and other "ways of dying" are not natural but signal the effects of sin, which is only conquered in Christ (Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1006–1009).



Questions of the Week

The reality of death is an inescapable horizon on our lives. For people of faith, it does not occasion despair but sober reflection and a summons to understand in faith the promise of eternal life and resurrection, which the Lord Jesus offers us.

Adults

How does the prospect of dying shift the way that I view my life today? How can it draw me into deeper faith?

Children

How can I stay connected with people who have died and gone to God?

Responding to God's Word . . .

One of the prefaces of the Mass for Sundays in Ordinary Time says, "Through his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has freed us from sin and death." Although people do not generally link sin and death, there are connections.

Both represent some form of estrangement with ourselves, with others, and with God. Both sin and death, as we experience them, do not belong in our lives. They do not reflect the world as God had intended it or created it. They do reflect a brokenness from which we need healing.

In the Rite of Christian Initiation, which is celebrated in a preparatory way on the Sundays prior to Passion or Palm Sunday, those who will be baptized are called to conversion. They are called to turn from personal sin (the story of the Samaritan woman), from sin embedded in the structures of social life (the story of the man born blind), and today, from the final enemy—death (in the story of Lazarus).

We have no power to eliminate our death. We do have the choice to believe in the one who moves us through death to new life, the one who said, "I am the resurrection and the life."

SUGGESTIONS

Use one of these suggestions or one of your own to respond to God's Word this week.

In the home. At mealtime, pray for those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith. Pray a special prayer for those who have died alone, unloved, and unwanted.

In the workplace or in school. Identify whatever seems to be especially death-dealing or diminishing, especially in the relationships that people have with each other. Creatively imagine what could be done to address those negative forces.

In the community. Inform yourself about the resources available in your community for bereavement.



Meditation Moment

Father Walter Ciszek spent 23 years in Russian prisons and work camps. Eventually he was released and returned home to America. His book *He Leadeth Me* describes the deep faith in eternal life that burns brightly in the hearts of Russia's ordinary people. All the decades of atheistic propaganda by the media have not altered this faith.

For reflection . . .

What convinces me most that there is life after death? What keeps me from living more in accord with my belief?

IF SEEDS IN THE BLACK EARTH CAN TURN INTO SUCH BEAUTIFUL ROSES, WHAT MIGHT THE HEART OF MAN BECOME IN ITS LONG JOURNEY TO THE STARS.

GILBERT K. CHESTERTON

FROM *VISION* BY MARK LINK, SJ

In Hope We Come to You

God, grant that
at the end of my life, I may
leave this world with the peace
and confidence that comes from
knowing the power of Christ's
Resurrection and your steadfast love.
Throughout my life on earth, give me
wisdom and perspective to know the
preciousness of the time that is mine
and to know the hope of eternal
life beyond the boundaries
of death. Grant this through
Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Carry this thought in your heart as a guide for your faith journey this week.

But we do not want you to be uninformed . . . about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.

1 Thessalonians 4:13–14

Profile in Faith

Saint Joseph of Arimathea

Saint Joseph was a member of the Jewish Council at the time of Jesus' death, although he did not take part in its deliberations. After the death of Jesus, he took his body and provided burial. He is the patron saint of funeral directors. His feast day is August 31.

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† Most Reverend Kevin J. Farrell, DD, Bishop of Dallas
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