

Fifth Sunday of Lent

April 2, 2017



*By your help, we beseech you, Lord our God,
may we walk eagerly in that same charity with which,
out of love for the world, your Son handed himself over to death.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Collect for the Fifth Sunday of Lent

On the first Sunday of Advent in 2011, the English-speaking world was given an updated translation of the Catholic Liturgy of the Mass.

“For decades at the very beginning of Mass, the priest has greeted the congregation by saying ‘The Lord be with you’ and congregants responded: ‘And also with you.’ However, ... the response has become: ‘And with your spirit.’ Familiar prayers, both spoken and chanted, have also changed to contain new words like ‘consubstantial’ and ‘incarnate’.

In the Nicene Creed, which is recited during services, the affirmation ‘We believe’ has been replaced with ‘I believe’

The changes were agreed following a year-long process to produce an English translation that is closer to the original Latin of the Roman Missal - the text of prayers and instructions for celebrating Mass.

It is the most significant change to worship for English-speaking believers since the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, which was held at the Vatican in Rome to address relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the modern world.

An English-language missal was produced by 1973, but that was intended to be temporary while improvements were made.

In 2001, the Vatican office that oversees worship issued a directive requiring translation of the English missal that would be closer to the Latin rather than to more familiar vernacular speech.”

(<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2066850/Catholic-churchs-English-language-liturgy-changes-today-unify-global-Mass-translations.html>)

Coming to Mass week after week, we may not see the integral relationship with everything that is part of our Mass. We understand that the Mass is composed of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The second part of the Mass, Liturgy of Eucharist, has many sections that do not change. But there are a few changeable parts. After the Preparation of the Gifts, the priest prays the Preface which can change each week. There are over Fifty Prefaces that are used for the various feast days and liturgical seasons. Before the Preface there is

the specific Prayer over the Gifts, and during Communion Rite there are specific Communion Antiphons and after communion there is a specific Prayer after Communion which change each week according to the particular liturgical seasons. There are thirteen Eucharistic prayers but generally only four are used.

The Liturgy of the Word is a different story. There are set readings for the liturgical seasons and for the feast days given by the church. There is what is called an “Ordo” that lists “order” for the Mass for each day and whether there is a feast or not and also the Liturgy of the Hours (Divine Office). In different parts of the world the Ordo differs, outlining different feast days that are pertinent to the regional areas.

Taking time to look at the Liturgy of the Word for this Sunday, we can see how Mother Church directs our spiritual life. For this particular Sunday, we have the gospel from John (John 11:1-45), which first of all was chosen for the catechumens and candidates who will be entering the Universal Church this Easter Vigil, who need to be given new life. It is also meant for each of us who will be renewing our baptismal commitment, raising us from our own sinfulness. This week’s gospel speaks of the dear friends of Jesus: Martha and Mary and their brother Lazarus who had died. There can be a little puzzle in that Martha seems to be the head of this house.

Looking at specific liturgical seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, the Triduum and the Easter season, the first reading with its Psalm Response, the second reading and the Gospel have a single theme. For Ordinary Time, on Sundays, the second reading is a continuous reading from one of the books of Scripture, and the first reading with the gospel have a single theme. For the daily readings, also in Ordinary Time, the first reading is a continuous reading from one of the books of Scripture.

When we see the Entrance Antiphon and the Collect, we understand how our faith life should develop.

“Give me justice, O God, and plead my cause against a nation that is faithless. From the deceitful and cunning rescue me, for you, O God, are my strength” (Psalm 42:1-2) is our Entrance Antiphon for this Sunday. This relates to the action of the Jewish leaders, after the raising of Lazarus who were looking forward to arrest Jesus, because the status quo was being disturbed by Jesus’ behavior. The beginning of the gospel for this week, paints the scene, so we have an understanding of who Lazarus and sisters, Martha and Mary, were. It also gives us insight as to Jewish funeral rites.

The Collect speaks in generalities of the goodness of Christ who cares and loves all people. Entering into the “meat” of the Liturgy of the Word, always, the first reading points to the theme of the gospel.

On this particular Sunday, it is speaking of resurrection. From the prophet Ezekiel (37:12-14) we see the whole people of Israel, who had been in Exile, being returned to the



promised land, as their dry bones are filled with the breath (spirit) of God (See Genesis 2:7). If you spend time preparing for the Mass, reading the entire chapter of Ezekiel you will get a deeper insight to this vision.

In response to this particular reading, we pray one of the seven Penitential Psalms, (Psalm 130). We pray the refrain: *With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.* Connected to the first reading we begin with the words *Out of the depths I cry to you O Lord.* Remembering the first reading from Ezekiel, we sense the sorrow of the Chosen People who were in exile among the Babylonians.

For this particular liturgical seasons, the Second Reading will follow the same theme as found in the First Reading and the Gospel. On this Sunday, life as spirit and not flesh is essential (Romans 8:8-11). From the moment of our Baptism, the Spirit of God dwells within us.

In the gospel for this week (John 11:1-45), once again, we have a picture painted, which speaks of the intimacy we need with our God. (It is interesting that the chapter following this one relates the story Mary of Bethany using a costly perfumed oil. This was to anoint the feet of Jesus at a dinner party, which was attended by Lazarus and served by Martha.)

The Gospel of John is very structured with seven signs rather than miracles as in the synoptic Gospels, with seven “*I am ...*” statements showing the divinity of Jesus:

- † *I am the bread of life, he who comes to me shall never hunger* (John 6:35)
- † *I am a light of the world, he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.* (John 8:12)
- † *I am the gate; if anyone enters through me shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.* (John 10:9)
- † *I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.* (John 10:11)
- † *I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me shall live even if he dies.* (John 11:25)
- † *I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me.* (John 14:6)
- † *I am the vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.* (John 15:1)

The beginning of this chapter indicates that Mary, Martha and Lazarus were close friends of Jesus since a message was sent that Lazarus was seriously ill. The reply of Jesus, “*This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it*” can be seen as confusing. Even more so, it is puzzling that Jesus waits two more days before he goes to Bethany.

The dialogue back and forth between Jesus and his disciples shows that they are conscious that the life of Jesus is in danger. Also, Jesus had to clarify that Lazarus was actually dead. Thomas, from whom not much is heard, says “*Let us also go to die with him.*” Reflecting on this, and thinking about the Christians in Africa, China, North Korea and the Middle East, it is important for us to examine if we would be willing to die being united to the Lord. (If we remember the gospel we had on the Third Sunday of Lent, Jesus left the area of Judea, and went to Galilee, passing through Samaria, because his life was in danger. Now he was being asked to return.)

The relationship of Jesus with this family is indicative of their closeness. This reminds us of how we can speak to Jesus in a very straightforward manner. The dialogue between Martha and Jesus is filled with faith. Thus, we need to ask ourselves how much faith we have as we petition the Lord.

Martha follows the same belief as the Pharisees as she believes in the resurrection. It is a question we need to examine in our own hearts as to whether we truly believe in the resurrection. As Martha and Jesus were speaking, Martha sends for Mary. Like her sister, Martha, Mary believed that Lazarus would not have died if Jesus had come when the message of Lazarus’ illness was sent.

It is important for each of us to realize that God feels our pain and can empathize with us. The Jews who were comforting Mary, spoke of the blind man whom Jesus had cured and would now see his power at this time.



“*Father,* I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me.*” And when he had said this, he cried out in a loud voice, “*Lazarus, come out!*” The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, “*Untie him and let him go.*”

During the week, may each of us spend time with these readings. They are indicative of how we should be living to being able to renew our Baptismal life.

*Lord, teach me to be generous.
Teach me to serve you as you deserve;
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labor and not to ask for reward,
save that of knowing that I do your will.*