

Fifth Sunday in Lent
Cycle A RCL
Revised

Ezekiel 37:1-14

The vision has to do with the Jews in exile in Mesopotamia. Comparing the exiled Jews to skeletons, God asks Ezekiel the seemingly absurd question: “Can these bones live (37:3)?” To restore the fortunes of Israel in the land of promise would resemble a miracle like making dead people rise and live again.

Psalm 130

Pilgrims to Jerusalem prayed the *laments* to ask God for relief from suffering. Such suffering could be caused by sin against God, sin against the neighbor, or for other reasons over which the pilgrim had no control. The pilgrim would have to work out sins against the neighbor in accordance with the law, not through the atonement rituals of the Temple; but the pilgrim could address suffering derived from sins against God with the laments of guilt, while suffering from unknown causes called for laments of innocence. Psalm 130 is a *lament of guilt*. The psalmist admits that he has wronged God but reminds God that resolution of the wrong could occur only if God should forgive the debt the psalmist incurred through his sin.

Romans 8:9-17

Paul uses the flesh-Spirit contrast to refer to modes of being. “Flesh” indicates the way we live in this present evil age, and “Spirit” indicates the way we shall live in the age to come. In these days between the Resurrection of Jesus and his coming again, both modalities are possible for us. Consequently, we must remember that the old age (“flesh”) is passing away and must endeavor not to be conformed to it.

The Aramaic word *'abba'* (verse 15) means “father,” and with the sign of the emphatic (-*a'*) at the end, we must understand it as a respectful form of address. Although *'abba'* has come over into Modern Hebrew to mean “daddy,” Aramaic in the time of Jesus would have accomplished such familiar address with something like *'avi*, “my father.”

John 11: 1-45

Jews of the first century believed that it took the soul three days to get to the underworld (Sheol) after the apparent death of the body. The information that Lazarus has been in the tomb four days (11:17, 39), therefore, means that he was irretrievably dead. In this last of the Fourth Gospel’s “signs,” Jesus shows his power over the last and greatest enemy, that of death and the grave. Martha believed in the resurrection of the dead, a doctrine shared by many Jews of apocalyptic persuasion; but she could not understand Jesus’ claim to be the resurrection itself (11:24-27).

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