5th Sunday of Lent – March 22nd, 2026.

"LAZARUS: COME OUT OF THE TOMB"

With Martha & Mary, we profess our belief that Christ is the Resurrection and the Life

A Locked Room: Years ago, a pastor visited a man in the hospital who had not been to church in decades. The man said something unforgettable: "I believe in God… but I've kept Him locked out of one room in my life." Years earlier he had made a decision that hurt someone deeply. The guilt stayed with him. So, he imagined his soul like a house. God could enter the living room. God could enter the kitchen. But one door stayed locked for thirty years. Finally, the pastor said, "You know what Lent is?" "Lent is when Jesus Christ stands at that locked door and knocks." And the man began to cry. Because for the first time this guy realized something: ***Jesus was NOT afraid of what was behind the door***.

Gospel of John (11:1-45) Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead: The raising of Lazarus to life is the sixth of seven "signs" that Jesus performs in the gospel of John. These seven signs all support Christ's claim to give life, "I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance" (John 10:10). 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. Indeed, Christ is the RESURECTION AND THE LIFE. 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. The immediate result of the miracle was faith, "many of the Jews who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him." (John 11:45). There is a dark side to the episode as well, it provokes Jewish hatred and opposition that will eventually lead to the death of Jesus Christ.

"Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation." Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. So from that day on they plotted to take his life". (John 11: 45-53).

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With our catechumens preparing for their Baptism at Easter, the gospel invites us to reflect upon what it means to call **JESUS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE**. It also 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.**

"LAZARUS, COME OUT":

That is exactly what happens in today's Gospel. Jesus walks straight toward the sealed tomb of Lazarus — the place everyone else avoids. ***Because Jesus was NOT afraid of what was behind the door or the tomb***. And He says: "Take away the stone."

<u>Sometimes we carry tombs in our own lives;</u>

† They may be sins we have hidden…

† Relationships that feel dead…

† Grief that lingers…

† Shame, hurt, fear, …

† Or guilt we have locked away for years.

And like Martha we sometimes think: "Lord… it's too late now… He has been dead four days! You arrived a little too late, the tomb has been long sealed, there is absolutely nothing you can do at this point!" But Jesus still says: "Take away the stone." Then He cries out: "**LAZARUS, COME OUT!"**

And the dead man walks out of the tomb — still wrapped in burial cloths. So, **JESUS SAYS: "UNBIND HIM AND LET HIM GO."** That is what Christ wants to do in every one of our lives.

He calls us out of whatever tomb we have been living in:

v Out of sin.

v Out of shame.

v Out of despair.

We will gather for our Lenten Communal Penance Service with the other parishes, and all the priests in Billings city at St Thomas the Apostle church, this Thursday at 7:00 PM. The Sacrament of confession is a reception and celebration of Christ's care, love, mercy and grace - "Unbind her/him and let her/him go." Amen.

BENEFITS OF REGULAR CONFESSION

Spiritual Benefits

1. Forgiveness of Sins: Regular confession provides an opportunity to receive forgiveness for sins committed.
2. Peace of Mind: It can bring peace of mind and a sense of relief.
3. Spiritual Growth: It helps individuals grow spiritually by acknowledging and overcoming weaknesses.
4. Increased Humility: It humbles the individual, making them more receptive to God's grace.
5. Deeper Relationship with God: It can foster a deeper relationship with God, as one acknowledges his/her dependence on Him.

Psychological Benefits

1. Reduced Guilt and Shame: Confessing sins can alleviate feelings of guilt and shame.
2. Improved Mental Health: It can contribute to improved mental health by reducing anxiety and stress.
3. Increased Self-Awareness: It helps to develop self-awareness, recognizing patterns and areas for improvement.
4. Better Decision-Making: It encourages one to reflect on his/her choices, leading to better decision-making.

Practical Benefits

1. Accountability: It provides accountability, encouraging individuals to take responsibility for their actions.
2. Support System: Confessing to a priest provides a support system, offering guidance and encouragement.
3. Improved Relationships: Regular confession can improve relationships with others, as individuals become more empathetic and understanding.

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4. Increased Sense of Community: Regular confession can foster a sense of community, connecting individuals with others who share similar values and goals.

Conclusion:

As we move closer to Easter, imagine Jesus Christ standing in front of whatever stone is covering your heart. And hear Him call your name personally the way He called Lazarus. "…. Come out."

Because the message of Lent is simple:

1) **For Jesus, No tomb is too sealed**
2) **For Jesus, No stone is too heavy**
3) **For Jesus, No sin is unforgivable**
4) **For Jesus, No life is too far gone**

And when Jesus calls your name, life can begin again. Amen.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Station Nine: *Everyone's way of the cross*, by Clarence Enzler, Ave Maria press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1970.

PRAYER: My Lord, … When all my strength is gone and guilt and self-reproach press me to the earth and seem to hold me fast, protect me from the sin of Judas – save me from despair. Lord, never let me feel that any sin of mine is greater than your love. No matter what my past has been, I can begin anew. Amen.

Thank you, for joining our weekly Sunday reflections.

God bless you.

Fr. Martin Ezeihuaku, MSP.