

# **OUR LADY, STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH**

## **HOMILY FOR THE 5<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY IN LENT (A)**

### **2<sup>nd</sup> APRIL 2017**

I wonder what we have each done to increase our focus, our own metanoia, on God so far this Lent. Personally I have been trying to get deeper into Matthew's Gospel it's been fabulous. You know, for those of you that have tried something, anything – well done. For those who haven't I wish I could energise you, this is an opportunity; you are missing out on growing closer with the world's best possible friend and lover. However, there's still time (with average reading speed Matt takes 2hr 14mins!).

Father Stephen last week highlighted that when we meet God face to face, he may ask us what we did or didn't do to tell others about him; and that we do carry responsibility for this. Pope John Paul compared it to being a soldier on a battlefield and walking past your injured brothers / sisters and leaving them in the war zone when you could have carried them to safety. Ultimately what we do boils down to the depth of my personal relationship with God, since it is from this relationship that my actions flow from. How do I stand with God? How am I getting on in knowing him better? There's a right time to make peace with God, and that time is now!

Our first reading is the end of that well known section in Ezekiel of the dry bones. He is told to prophesy over them and God will open their graves and put his Spirit in them and give them life. This represents the whole dryness that was affecting the people of Israel that God will restore to life. Are you feeling dry at the moment? We all struggle, and I confess that my recent weeks have been spiritually very dry – but God's word is alive you see; so for me, prayerfully reading Matthew is rejuvenating me. There are approximately 336 hours until Easter - it would use less than 0.3% of this time to read one of the Gospels....you don't even have to give up your coffee to do this!

So, Ezekiel listens to God and prophesies rejuvenation / life. How much more does Jesus do! He also goes to a grave, where Lazarus has been dead four days. It's a cave with a stone rolled over it. I do hope that wakes you all up. We'll read about another cave with a stone covering it in a couple of weeks. When Jesus raises Lazarus, this is so much more than just a miracle. Yes, the miracle is, well, miraculous! But much more than this it is a sign that all who die in Christ will also be raised with him! And whilst Lazarus was raised, he was going to die again, wasn't he! But when we rise to new life it will be for eternity.

As Paul wrote to the Romans 8.11.....if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, then he who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your own mortal bodies through the Spirit living in you.

God gives us his Spirit so that we may be made alive in Christ. Yes, in heaven, but also now. We can experience the power of the risen Jesus in our personal lives today.

I ask you, and myself, maybe I am in a cave, a spiritual grave today? Have I allowed myself to become so pre-occupied by something in my life that I have effectively shut myself into my own cave, and need someone to roll away the stone? What place of self isolation have I made? Maybe it's watching immoral things on TV or a computer; maybe a cave of self-pity; maybe of self doubt where everyone else seems so much better than me; maybe I am holding on to past hurts, refusing to forgive. As we heard at Alpha, that's like giving rent free space in my head to someone I don't want there!

If I am in a cave, will I let Jesus open it for me? Maybe if I spare <0.3% of my time this coming fortnight prayerfully reading his word, he may roll back my stone. If I'm not in a cave, will I perhaps help roll back the stone for someone who is? When Jesus arrived at Mary and Martha's, Lazarus had been dead four days; and Jesus tells us this was so that he could bring glory to God. So he raises Lazarus, brings glory to God, and many believed in him. We can let Jesus give us new life and in turn bring glory to God.

And recall, Thomas is named as being there. Yet even though he saw this miracle, he still doubted when he met the risen Jesus! So when we have a doubt, that's OK. But don't dwell on them. As Liam, one of the prisoners in the YOI doing Alpha at the moment reminded me – as Christians we should believe our beliefs and doubt our doubts!

Whatever our cave is we don't need to be rotting there, Jesus is calling us "Come out and come into life". And note Jesus then instructed Martha and Mary and those present to unbind him. In the same way Jesus is instructing us "unbind her, untie him".

Those around us, and perhaps ourselves, don't belong in the darkness of weakness, anger, addictions, self regrets, loneliness.

We have to call out "Come out of your tombs, come into life", we must re-affirm them and each other, help untie those bonds. Will we make the most of the next fortnight and try to do this?

**Rev Jonathan de Kretser**