

Encountering the Word

with Jeff Cavins

Fifth Sunday of Lent (A)

Ezekiel 37:12-14 • Psalm 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8
Romans 8:8-11 • John 11:1-45



Breaking Chains

One of humanity's deepest fears is death. It feels final and beyond our control, yet God reveals that he holds authority even over the grave. In Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones, the Lord promises to open the graves of his people, breathe his Spirit into them, and restore them to life (Ezekiel 37). While Ezekiel's vision first pointed to Israel's restoration as a nation, it ultimately reveals a deeper truth: God's power to restore life where there is sin, despair, and even death itself.

This promise is fulfilled in the raising of Lazarus. After four days in the tomb, Jesus stands before death itself and calls Lazarus forth. The one who was thought lost is restored to life, though still bound in burial cloths. Jesus not only raises him, but commands that he be unbound and set free. In this, Christ reveals both his lordship over death and his desire to release his people from everything that holds them captive!



Jesus Raising Lazarus, iconic mural in the Church of the Annunciation, Jerusalem

This is not only Lazarus' story, it is also ours. Though baptism bestows on us the fullness of new life in Christ, we often remain bound by sin, fear, shame, or habits that weigh us down. Yet Jesus desires more than mere survival for us; he wants us to walk freely as beloved children of God, renewed by his Spirit! And when this freedom takes root in us, it becomes a powerful testimony. Just as many came to believe because of what they saw in Lazarus, others may come to believe when they witness what Christ has done in our lives.

Living the Gospel

The raising of Lazarus shows us that Christ not only restores life but also sets us free. This week, bring your sins and burdens to Jesus in prayer, especially through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Allow him to speak his word of freedom into your life: "Unbind him, and let him go" (John 11:44). Then live as one unbound, sharing with others how Christ has given you new life so that they, too, may come to believe in the One who loves them.

Dive Deeper

Scan this code to watch:



Or go to

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=My1Dlj1jIQ4> and
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZ1bOhqfLEs>

Ponder and Pray

» What are the “grave clothes” still binding you—sins, fears, resentments, or habits—that keep you from walking in the freedom of Christ? How might the Sacrament of Reconciliation this Lent become a place of unbinding for you?

» “The Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you” through baptism (Romans 8:11). Do you live with confidence in that power, or do you often remain trapped in self-reliance and discouragement? How can you call more deeply on the Holy Spirit’s life within you?

» Like Lazarus, your freedom is not for you alone; it is a testimony to others. Who in your life needs to hear what God has done for you? How might sharing your story of healing and mercy draw others to faith in Christ?

“ **If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit dwelling in you.** ”
—Romans 8:11

Make It Your Own

You and others in your household may use this space to write about anything related to today’s Mass. It might be your view of Jeff Cavins’s reflection, your priest’s homily, your answers to the questions on this page—whatever will help you and your household get the most out of today’s celebration.

Jeff Cavins is the author of *The Bible Timeline: The Story of Salvation* and the creator of the video series *Sundays with Ascension*, from which this reflection was adapted.

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