



DIOCESE OF HAMILTON

700 King Street West, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8P 1C7

Fifth Sunday of Lent Children's Liturgy of the Word

As Lent enters its final and more intense days, the Church proclaims a bold and consoling truth: no tomb is beyond God's power to open. The human experience of exile, sin, grief, and mortality is taken seriously. We know what it is to feel spiritually dry, weighed down by regret, trapped in patterns we cannot break, or overcome by loss. The cry that rises from "the depths" is real — and it is heard.

Yet despair is never the final word. God's mercy is deeper than our sin, and His Spirit is stronger than death. What appears closed, sealed, or irreversible to us is not final in the hands of the Lord. The breath of God brings life where there seems to be none. Resurrection is not merely a future event we wait for at the end of time; it begins now, wherever grace restores what has been wounded and awakens what has grown cold.

This Sunday reveals that Christian hope is personal and relational. The Lord does not act from a distance; He enters into human sorrow and stands before our sealed tombs. He calls each of us by name. The life He offers is not abstract optimism but a living relationship with the One who conquers death from within.

As Holy Week approaches, the Church gently asks:

What in my life feels buried?

What have I stopped hoping can change?

The journey toward Easter invites us to trust that Christ can roll away the stone, untie what binds us, and lead us into the freedom of new life — a life already beginning in us and destined for fullness in His Resurrection.

Background

Ezekiel 37:12-14 Through the prophet Ezekiel, God speaks to Israel in exile, a people who feel spiritually dead and without hope. Using the powerful image of graves being opened, the Lord promises to restore His people to life and bring them back to their land. This prophecy is not only about national renewal but anticipates the deeper promise of resurrection. The breath or Spirit of God is the source of life, revealing that where human strength fails, God's Spirit can revive what seems utterly lost.

Psalms 130 is a prayer from the depths of suffering and sin, crying out to God for help. Though aware of human weakness, the psalmist places full trust in the Lord's mercy and forgiveness. Like watchmen waiting for dawn, the faithful hope patiently in God, confident that He will redeem and restore His people.

Romans 8:8-11 St. Paul teaches that those who live according to the Spirit belong to Christ and share in His life. Though the body remains subject to death because of sin, the Spirit dwelling within believers gives true life and righteousness even now. Paul assures the Christian community that the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise them. Resurrection, therefore, is not only a future event but a present reality rooted in the indwelling Holy Spirit.

John 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45 The raising of Lazarus is the final sign before Jesus' Passion. Jesus delays His arrival to show God's glory, and when He comes, Lazarus has been dead for four days, highlighting death's finality. In His conversation with Martha, Jesus states, "I am the resurrection and the life," emphasizing that resurrection is found in Him. Martha acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah, exemplifying faith amidst grief and confusion.

The scene reveals Jesus' deep humanity and divine authority as He weeps, fully entering into human sorrow. Standing before the sealed tomb, He commands the stone to be removed and calls Lazarus by name. The life-giving Word brings Lazarus back to life, though still bound in burial cloths. Jesus instructs the community to unbind him, emphasizing that restored life is realized within the community of faith. This miracle points to Christ's own Resurrection, where death is ultimately conquered.

The Liturgy

Procession from the main Church

After the opening prayer, when all are seated, the leaders come forward and stand facing the altar.

Priest: (in these or similar words)

Children, nothing is impossible for Jesus. People who believe in God and have the Holy Spirit living in them will rise from death to life. Go with your leaders and listen to Jesus.

Once most of the children have formed a procession, the leader with the book proceeds to the celebration site. The second leader usually walks behind the children. Upon arrival at the CLoW room, the leader places the book on the prepared table.

Welcome.

The leaders assist the children in sitting and preparing. **Begin with the Sign of the Cross.** Help the children think and connect their actions as they touch their foreheads, shoulders, and stomachs. The leader may offer the following prayer, in these or similar words.

God of life and love, You sent your Son to show us your promise of everlasting life. Open our ears to listen to the readings.

Let's quiet our hearts and make the Sign of the Cross.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Amen.

Invite the children to listen to the readings. Proclaiming all the readings is unnecessary; however, the Gospel is required.

READINGS

FIRST READING

Ezekiel 37.12-14

A reading from the book of the prophet Ezekiel.

Thus says the Lord God: "I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people.

"I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act," says the Lord.

The word of the Lord.

A period of silence is observed after the reading.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 130.1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7b-8

R. With the Lord, there is steadfast love
and great power to redeem.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.
Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications! **R.**

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered. **R.**

I wait for the Lord,
my soul waits, and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning. **R.**

For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.
It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities. **R.**

SECOND READING

Romans 8.8-11

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Romans.

Brothers and sisters:

Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

The word of the Lord.

A period of silence is observed after the reading.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

The sisters ¹ of Lazarus ² sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard this, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ³ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then, after this, he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.⁴ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

Jesus was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb.

¹ Lazarus had two sisters: Mary and Martha, who lived with him in Bethany. These women occupied distinct roles in their household and in their relationship with Jesus.

² The brother of Martha and Mary, the friend of Jesus. The family lived at Bethany, a village within two miles of Jerusalem. Lazarus was the subject of the greatest miracle of the Gospel story.

³ This pronouncement carries deeper significance than surface-level healing. The miracle would lead many to believe that Jesus was the Messiah and would bring about his death, with "being glorified" functioning as a frequent expression in John's Gospel for Christ's death regarded as the mode of his return to glory.

⁴ Jewish tradition held that the soul remained near the body for three days, hoping to reenter it, but departed once decomposition became visible. By the fourth day, this window of possibility had definitively closed—any revival would be unmistakably miraculous rather than a case of mistaken death.

It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth.

Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

The gospel of the Lord.

REIMAGINED READINGS FOR CHILDREN

The reimagined readings below are intended for use after the children have heard the original reading. The intent is to allow the children to listen to the original reading and help them better understand it (not replace it).

Read at a minimum, the Gospel, which has the highest priority, and then ask the children to sit down. You can then read the reimagined reading. Leaders may not have time to read all of the reading. If time permits, after the Gospel, proclaim the Psalm, and then the first reading, if time permits.

Reimagined readers must always remain faithful to the original Scripture's intent, making it age-appropriate for children to understand.

FIRST READING

Ezekiel 37.12-14

Imagine a world hit hard by a massive storm – homes flooded, streets empty, and everyone feeling totally wiped out, like zombies wandering around with no energy left. Children like you are stuck in a big shelter far from home, hearts heavy, dreams crushed. It feels like you're buried alive in sadness and fear. But then, God's voice booms like a loving parent waking up their family:

"Listen up, my people! I'm digging you out of this mess right now. I'm pulling you up from that dark, stormy pit where you've been stuck. And guess what? I'm bringing you back home to your own neighbourhoods, your schools, your playgrounds in the land I promised.

You'll know it's me, God, doing this miracle when I bust open those graves of hopelessness and lift you high. No more feeling dead inside!"

God doesn't stop there. Picture a warm, glowing light – like the ultimate energy boost from the best video game power-up ever. "I'm breathing my own Spirit right into you! You'll jump up, full of life, laughing and running again. I'll plant your feet firm on your own ground, safe and strong.

Believe it – I, the Lord, said it, and I'm making it happen!" says God with a huge smile.

Just like that, children start waking up: sharing toys, rebuilding forts, helping neighbours. The storm's gone, but God's promise stays – turning our "graves" of tough times into adventures of new life and hope. No matter what disaster hits – sickness, fights, or feeling lost – God revives us with His Spirit, bringing us home to joy.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 130.1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7b-8

R. God, hear me.

I call to you, God!

Listen to my prayers! R.

If you counted our sins, God,
who could stand?

But you forgive us—
that's why we love and fear you. R.

God has big love,
and power to save us all.

He will free his people
from every wrong. R.

SECOND READING

Romans 8.8-11

Dear friends:

People who only think about their selfish wants (like grabbing toys or being mean) can't make God happy. But you are different! You're not stuck in those bad habits. You're full of God's Spirit, because God's Spirit lives right in your heart. If you don't have Jesus' Spirit helping you, you're not really on his team.

But if Jesus lives in you, your body might still get tired or sick from wrong choices, but God's Spirit gives you real life—a happy, strong life—because God makes everything right. And get this: The same Spirit who woke Jesus up from being dead lives in you! God, who raised Jesus, will make your bodies strong and alive forever too—with his Spirit right there inside you.

God's Spirit is like a superpower that beats bad stuff and brings Easter hope every day!

GOSPEL

John 11.3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45

Jesus had two good friends named Martha and Mary. They had a brother named Lazarus. One day, Lazarus got very sick. His sisters sent a message to Jesus: "Lord, your friend Lazarus is sick!"

Jesus said, "This sickness won't end in death. It's to show God's glory and make the Son of God look great." Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters a lot. But he waited two more days before going to them.

When Jesus got there, Lazarus had been dead for four days. He was in a cave with a big stone in front. Martha ran out to meet Jesus. She said, "Lord, if you had come sooner, my brother wouldn't have died. But I know God will give you anything you ask."

Jesus told her, "Your brother will live again." Martha said, "I know—at the end of the world."

Jesus replied, "I am the resurrection and the life! If you believe in me, even if you die, you will live. And if you live and believe in me, you will never really die. Do you believe this?"

Martha said, "Yes, Lord! I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God!"

Jesus felt very sad inside. He asked, "Where is Lazarus?" They said, "Come and see." Jesus cried. People said, "Look how much he loved Lazarus!"

Jesus went to the tomb. "Move the stone!" he said. Martha said, "Lord, he will smell bad. He's been dead four days!"

Jesus said, "Believe, and you will see God's glory!" They moved the stone. Jesus prayed, "Father, thank you for hearing me. I say this so everyone knows you sent me." Then he shouted, "Lazarus, come out!"

Lazarus walked out—alive! His hands and feet were wrapped in cloths. Jesus said, "Untie him and let him go!" Many people saw this and believed in Jesus.

Reflection

The leader may offer this reflection in these or similar words. Remember the amount of time available to return to the main assembly. The leader may wish to reduce the number of questions. An excellent place to begin is the question:

Alternate Reflection

What did you hear? Allow children to respond.

Today, we hear a wonderful story about a good friend of Jesus named Lazarus. Jesus shows us that he has power over death and brings new life to everyone who believes in him.

Imagine your best friend gets really sick and even dies. Jesus had a best friend like that—Lazarus. Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha, were so sad. They sent a message to Jesus: "Lord, the one you love is sick!"

Have you ever felt really sad, like Lazarus' friends?

But Jesus waited a little before going to them. When he arrived, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days! Everyone was crying. Jesus felt their sadness deep in his heart. He cried too! Then he went to the tomb—a big cave with a huge stone in front. Jesus prayed to his Father in heaven and called out in a loud voice: "Lazarus, come out!" And guess what? Lazarus came out, still wrapped in cloths, alive!

Sometimes we feel "dead" inside—like when we're sad, scared, or sorry for doing something wrong. But Jesus calls us by name: "Come out! Live with me!" He wants to unwrap the sad clothes and help us shine with joy.

How can we be like Jesus and help others out of sadness? Hug, kind word, prayer?

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, even if they die, will live." Just like Lazarus came back to life, Jesus can bring new life to us, too!

Jesus died and rose again at Easter to give us this new life forever! During Lent, we're getting ready for that big celebration. Let's promise to listen when Jesus calls our name and live like Lazarus—full of life and love.

Following the reflection, the prayer leader invites everyone to stand to profess their faith. Recite the Creed or use the sample below to ask the children to respond.

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The Creed

Depending on the time, a simple profession of faith may be made (see below).

Leader: Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth?

All: I believe.

Leader: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, who gave his life for us?

All: I believe.

Leader: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts and gives us everlasting life?

All: I believe.

Leader: This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it.

Prayer of the Faithful

Leaders may begin the intercessions by announcing the needs they know. The leader may need to repeat and paraphrase the petition, concluding it with the cue for the response: 'We pray.' All respond to each petition by saying, "Lord, hear our prayer." Sample intercessions are below.

The intercessions are said. The Leader introduces them, and an assistant announces them.

The leader says:

Jesus brought Lazarus back to life. Let's pray to him for our world! Our response is: 'Lord, hear our prayer.' R: Lord, hear our prayer.

Assistant:

For Pope Leo XIV and all leaders in our Church, that they help us follow Jesus with happy hearts. We pray to the Lord. R:

Assistant:

For our families and friends, that we love each other and share Jesus' joy every day. We pray to the Lord. R:

Assistant:

For children who are sick or sad, like Lazarus' friends, that Jesus wipes away their tears and makes them strong. We pray to the Lord. R:

Assistant:

For people getting ready for Baptism at Easter, that they hear Jesus calling their names. We pray to the Lord. R:

Assistant:

In the quiet of our hearts, we offer our own prayers... [pause]. We pray: Come, Lord Jesus. R:

The Leader says:

God our Father, listen to these prayers from your children. Through Jesus, your Son, who lives forever, hear us. Amen.

Return to the church

Ask the children to return to the main assembly. Ask them to return quietly and reflect on what they have heard and what they are now doing. Be mindful of children who may have difficulty finding their families.



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