

Homily
5th Sunday of Lent
By Deacon Jim Olshefski
March 29, 2020

Life, death and resurrection: That is the predominant theme in today's readings, in my recent life experience and in the extraordinary times in which we find ourselves.

In the first reading on this, the 5th Sunday of Lent, we hear God, through the prophet Ezekiel, promise the exiled Israelites in Babylon that he will "open [their] graves" of exile and bring them back to the Promised Land. Just as we heard last Sunday in the episode with Jesus opening the eyes of the blind man, in today's gospel according to John, Jesus reveals, for all to see, the divine purpose underlying Lazarus' illness and death: The glory of God and the glorification of the Son of God.

Life, death and resurrection: Although not nearly as dramatic as Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, I have recently had a startling experience with cataract surgery in both eyes. Legally blind since grade school, I have worn "coke-bottle" eye glasses or contact lenses throughout most of my life. Earlier this year, my fading eyesight slumped to a nadir when, at an annual eye exam, I was unable to see even the big "E" on the eyechart. During the two week interval between surgeries, first on my right eye then my left, I continually marveled at the difference between what I perceived through the "good new" eye versus my "bad old" eye. I was absolutely stunned with the contrast in the clarity of sight and the vibrancy of the colors all around me:

- The dull blue/gray of the pre-sunrise sky which I saw through the "bad eye" contrasted with the spectacularly vivid blue which I observed with my "good eye."
- Similarly, the grays, blues and whites of our freshly painted home came, unexpectedly and dramatically, to life.

I had truly experienced a resurrection of my eyesight!

Although my recent experience with my eyesight had a great impact on me personally, it was of absolutely no consequence to the world. In contrast, during this time of world-wide pandemic, we are all experiencing death, literally in many instances; figuratively, for the rest of us through the "social distancing" mandated as a necessary step to try to control the spread of the insidious COVID-19 virus.

Back on Ash Wednesday, I'm sure that most of us did not expect our Lenten journey to end-up where it is now; these are bizarre times. But I encourage you, toward the end of Lent, to intensify the traditional Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

An opportunity for prayer comes from Pope Francis who has asked us to build-up in prayer the lonely, the elderly, doctors, nurses, healthcare workers, government authorities, police and other first responders. He also stresses the importance of praying for the dead: "These days we are hearing the news of so many people who are dying, men and women who are dying alone without being able to say goodbye to their loved ones. Let us think about them and pray for them."

An opportunity for almsgiving has emerged during this crisis caused by the Corona virus. Due to our inability to gather together as a community at Eucharist, our weekly collections have been severely and negatively impacted. However, the Cathedral staff, including Morning Glory Ministries, is still actively providing much needed support to our parish and to those on the fringes of society. I urge you to continue your support of our vital Cathedral ministries with your time, talent and treasure: Please stay connected with our Cathedral community and continue your contributions electronically at the [Cathedral website](#) or through the mails.

A good resource for continuing our Lenten journey during these unsettling times is the March 27, 2020 edition of *The Catholic Key*, which was sent to every Catholic household in the diocese. I encourage you to read through this issue; it contains numerous articles on what we can do during this time of mandated isolation to enhance our mental, physical and spiritual well-being. I particularly urge you to read the articles entitled:

- ["Accidental Monasticism"](#) by Bishop Johnston (p.4)
- [How to stay quarantined, stay married, and keep your friends](#) (p. 13)
- [The Coronavirus and sitting quietly in a room alone by Bishop Robert Barron](#) (p.14)

I conclude with a prayer that Bishop Johnston urges everyone to pray during this unparalleled time in our history:

Prayer to Mary, Health of the Sick

O Mary,

*you always shine on our path
as a sign of salvation and of hope.*

*We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick,
who at the cross took part in Jesus' pain, keeping your faith firm.
You, Patroness and Protector of the People of the United States of America,
know what we need,
and we are sure you will provide
so that, as in Cana of Galilee,
we may return to joy and to feasting
after this time of trial.*

*Help us, Mother of Divine Love,
to conform to the will of the Father
and to do as we are told by Jesus,
who has taken upon himself our sufferings
and carried our sorrows
to lead us, through the cross,
to the joy of the resurrection. Amen.*

*Under your protection, we seek refuge, Holy Mother of God. Do not disdain the entreaties of
we who are in trial, but deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin. Amen.*