

FATHER MARK SCHULTE
HOMILY
FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT (A)
MARCH 22, 2026

“Womb to Tomb”

In today’s Gospel word came to Jesus that His friend Lazarus was sick (Jn 11:1-45). Undoubtedly the sisters of Lazarus were hoping that Jesus would come right away and cure him of the illness. Jesus does not respond immediately but instead waits four days before going. Jesus will use the occasion of Lazarus’ death to miraculously raise him from the tomb, so that through this act, “The Son of God may be glorified.” Jesus said to His disciples, “For your sakes I am glad I was not there, that you may come to believe.” This act will be proof of His Divinity to His Disciples and that the power of the resurrection comes through Him. He will say, “I am the resurrection and the life”, because only He has the power over death.

Jesus will look up to heaven and offer a prayer to His heavenly Father and then command Lazarus to come out of the tomb. Lazarus will emerge from the tomb bound head to foot with burial wrappings, a sign that death binds a man such that for a time death has power over a man and only Jesus can free a man from the power and confines of death. “Unbind him and let him go free” Jesus said.

Resurrection from the dead is a kind of “rebirth” from death to life. It could be said that a person is essentially born several times in the course of his existence. The first birth is in the mind of God. Through the prophet Jeremiah God said: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you” (Jer 1:5) (Ps 139:15-16) (CCC 2270). The second birth is in the mind of a husband and wife who come together in love longing for a child. The third birth is the actual physical birth from the womb. The fourth birth is a spiritual birth often referred to as being “born again” (CCC 1265). This takes place in the Sacrament of Baptism through the power of the Holy Spirit. The fifth birth is a kind of middle birth which takes place through the Sacrament of Penance. After being forgiven of his sins, especially mortal sin that brings death to the soul, the penitent emerges from the confessional after being loosed from the bondage of sin and spiritual death and is given new life. The last and final birth takes place at the resurrection from the dead. The body is freed by Jesus Christ from the bondage of the tomb (a kind of womb) and is reunited with its soul to live eternally with God the Father in heaven. From the mind of the Father until the final resurrection a person is born several times.

God speaking through the prophet Ezekiel prophesied the resurrection from the dead. He said, “I will open your graves and have you rise from them... I will put my spirit in you, that you may live, and I will settle you in your land (heaven), thus you will know that I am the Lord” (Ez 37:12-14) (CCC 703, 715).

The Apostle Paul tells us that it is the Spirit of Jesus dwelling in us that brings our mortal bodies to life (Rm 8:8-11). Jesus is, “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (Jn 14:6).

Lent prepares us for Easter Sunday and Easter culminates in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is the first to conquer death. He is the “first fruits” from the dead of all who have died (1 Cor 15:20). Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead to show His Apostles and us that only He has power over the bonds of death, death both physically and spiritually. This understanding makes Christians a people of hope. Our hope is not in a pain free life here on earth, but in the resurrection to eternal life in heaven that awaits us.

There are so many people who lack an understanding of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus calls upon us to share our hope with them. We are the “light of the world” (Mt 5:14-16).

NOTE: CCC = Catechism of the Catholic Church