

Sunday, Fifth Week of Lent

Ezekiel 37:12-14; John 7:40-53

Life out of death – mystery beyond all mysteries! Today we walk with Ezekiel and John and join up with Ms. Burnett, author of *THE SECRET GARDEN* to reflect on how all three of these "readings" reveal a similar insight. In the book of Ezekiel, the lament from Israel, "our bones are dried up, our hope is lost and we are cut off" metaphors the experience of being "dead." In the book of John, Martha attempts to stop the opening of the tomb: "It has been four days now, and surely there will be a stench." In Burnett's book, Mary Lennox finds an opening to a walled off garden where "one can see only grey or brown sprays and branches" with none of these showing "any signs of even a tiny leaf-bud anywhere."

Reading these passages evokes memories many of us have, memories of being entombed in depression, "tied up" with paralyzing anxiety, feeling more dead than alive. Heart-breaking loss is often followed by dry-as-dust emptiness and joylessness, feeling "cut off" from life, isolated, alone and abandoned. What brought forth new life in us is similar to how those dried-up bones became clothed with sinews and flesh, able to join in the dance of life, how Lazarus came to life and how a garden, once dead, burst into myriad rainbows of greenery and flowers, and with the garden, new life into the hearts and limbs of those who tended it.

In all three "readings" a new Spirit is breathed into what once was lifeless – the Spirit of God's Faithful Love. In Ezekiel God says: "I will put my Spirit in you that you may live . . . I have promised this and I will do it." The community gathered around the tomb witnesses not only Jesus' love for Martha, Mary and Lazarus, but God's self-giving love in Jesus: "I am the resurrection and the life: those who believe in me, even if they die, will come to life . . ." God's faithful love calls forth Lazarus out of the tomb and calls us out of whatever entombs or limits our life. While the secret garden was coming alive, so also were two children coming alive with it. Orphaned at an early age, Mary developed a tough shell around her heart to ward off any more pain – a self-protection manifesting itself in behaviors to warrant the nick-name, Mary the Contrary. Colin, abandoned by a grieving father, decided early on that he was the cause of his mother's death and was also soon to die. The fidelity of Mary's friendship, the goodness of fresh air and loving tenderness of his friend Dickon and Dickon's mother drew life into the heart and limbs of Colin. From bed, to wheelchair and finally to a leaping, running lad, Colin was also a Lazarus loved back into life. Ben, the gardener, recognizes God's love and presence in the miracles happening in these two children and in the garden, inviting the children to sing a song of praise to the source of all Life and Goodness.

During this Lent, God is gently inviting us to bring whatever dried-up bones are rattling around in our heart, whatever keeps us entombed, whatever is longing for more life to God. We pray for the grace to recognize and remove whatever impedes receiving love, and also the grace to recognize whatever it is that limits the love we give. As God's love is received and given, God's Life in us grows and flourishes.

Marilyn Gooley, SNJM
Friend of the Tacoma Dominicans



Monday, Fifth Week of Lent

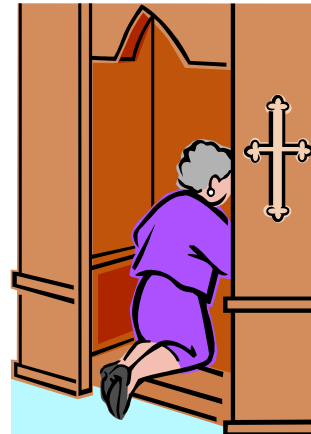
Daniel 13:41-62; John 8:1-11

The lovely account of Susanna in the Book of Daniel appears to be simply an account of God's protection of the virtuous by divine intervention. However, its inclusion in relation to the other material in the Book of Daniel can be read as a veiled way of saying that those who should be our leaders and guides in virtue can themselves become corrupted and be the source of great suffering for us, as we have so painfully experienced recently in the clergy sexual abuse scandal. As with Susanna we can trust that God will protect and strengthen us in our faith despite these confusing experiences.

So with the woman taken in adultery in John's Gospel. When circumstances in our lives lead us to behaviors that are readily judged as sinful by others, we can count on our God, who knows and understands these circumstances, to be the one not to condemn us, but to look beyond those behaviors, and challenge and encourage us to "sin no more." Merciful and loving is our God, always ready to give us a fresh start and the assurance of his support and grace.

- Do we believe in God's mercy for our priests who so gravely failed the youth who trusted them?
- How ready are we to give another chance to those who have fallen?

Mary Mark Schoenstein, OP
Mission San Jose Dominicans



Tuesday, Fifth Week of Lent

Numbers 21:4-9; John 8:21-30

I first heard about the January 8, 2011 mass shooting in Tucson in a pulpit announcement to a large crowd gathered for liturgy at a diocesan conference. I witnessed in myself and in those around me how loss of life stirs up our spirits and sets us on edge. We reacted with horror, disbelief, and anger. Immediately we asked, "Why did this happen?" Tremendous sadness overtook us.

In the ensuing days bitterness set in for many of us. We complained against God and against those we looked to for leadership saying, "I'm disgusted with this wretched food." Our political rhetoric and a host of other on-going human failings were just too hard to stomach. We responded humanly as did the children of Israel in today's reading. We tried but could not avert our eyes from the scene of the tragedy where "many of them died." We felt shame and helplessness. "What could we do now?" Some of us blamed God. "How could God allow such a thing? God must be punishing us." Some blamed themselves. "It is our own fault, our actions deserve it." Many of us prayed to God, "Take these serpents away from us."

How did God respond to this request in today's reading?

God responded compassionately, albeit very evenly to Moses and the people. God did *not* say, "You deserve this." God also did not directly intervene, but involved instruments: the person of Moses himself who both prayed and acted, and an image of the bronze serpent, the very thing that had afflicted the people. "Whenever anyone who had been bitten by a serpent looked at the bronze serpent, he lived." God can use the very thing that afflicts us as an instrument to bring us life. A sudden tragic loss of life *can* change our bitter attitudes toward one another. A serious illness can effect personal conversion. And these effects can happen soon or in God's time over long forty-year periods.

Am I willing *today* to be like Moses? to pray "for the people" of whom I am one? to listen for God's word to me? and to act accordingly? We are called to look compassionately and to intercede for others. We are called to listen for God's response. God invites each of us to be willing compassionate instruments of life to others and to ourselves. So we are asked today to *let go* of our bitterness and to *let God* act through us. It is in this exercise of hope that God leads us as a people out of the bitter deserts of suffering to the promised kingdom of God.



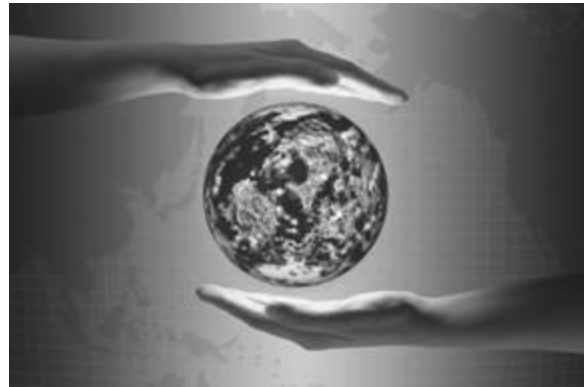
Patty Riley, OP
San Rafael Dominicans

Wednesday, Fifth Week of Lent

Daniel 3: 14-20, 91-95; John 8: 31-4

**“If you make my word your home, you will indeed be my disciples,
You will learn the truth . . . ” (John 8: 31-32)**

Dominicans are known to have a passion for Truth, the motto of the Order. We are called to seek the fullness of truth wherever it is revealed, even in the most unlikely places. As seekers and preachers, we are called to cultivate a deeply reflective attitude toward life in all its forms, an attitude that will lead us to question, to probe, to learn and to allow ourselves to be changed. Through practice of contemplative prayer and awareness, we strive to see our world through the eyes of God. For Dominic, study is a form of prayer, connected to and part of contemplation. One of the deepest links between study and contemplation lies in the human spirit, in our thirst for truth, goodness, beauty, love, fulfillment. Only God can fill this yearning as St. Augustine reminds us: “You have made us for yourself O God...our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” Our desire to know God reflects our desire for God. In her **Dialogue**, Catherine of Siena came to learn that **desire** was the basis for our relationship with God.



We strive to satisfy this yearning for the Holy One by listening to the Word in Scripture, in Creation, in one another, in all of reality. We become hearers of God’s Word before we become proclaimers. How blessed are we who can now read the Scriptures with the lens of the New Universe Story! In her book, **Radical Amazement**, Judy Cannato tells us: **“We believe not only that God initiated the creation event, but the divine presence flows in and through the experience of on-going creation . . . As clearly as the parables told by Jesus challenged his listeners to ask questions about who they were and what their relationships meant, so now the new universe story challenges us.”** The new cosmology uses new images to deepen our relationship to the Holy One, to one another and to all creation at a time when these relationships appear to be fragile.

We must make time to integrate this new story, to take it in, to live it out and to connect it with our own story. When we are able to see God’s creative hands in the beauties of creation, we are inspired to care for earth as the work of God’s hands. We are strengthened in our resolve to practice and to preach eco-justice and “end the violence that erodes our planet.” Our awareness of this truth links us with the One who promised we would know the truth, the One who is our Truth, our Way, and our Life.

Catherine Prendergast, OP
Tacoma Dominicans

April 13

Thursday, Fifth Week of Lent

Genesis 17: 3-9; John 8: 51-59



In Genesis 17 v. 1-27 “God the Almighty” renewed the covenant with His people through Abraham. This commitment included the promise of land and the assurance that He would be Abraham’s God and the God of all Abraham’s descendants. Thousands of years later, as descendants of Abraham, the Divine Covenant applies to each of us.

It is clear that by bestowing this free gift on us our God accepts us, with all our faults and failings, as his own. As instruments of this promise, God uses us to make our world a better place by spreading the Kingdom, The Word of God. If we believe and hear the message of God’s promise to us we must respond to the call of Faith regardless of the cost.

It is in this context that I see our call. As community, we need to be instruments of Peace and Justice in our part of the world. We commit ourselves as individuals and community to champion the needs of the poor and the oppressed, the marginalized. Because of this covenant we work and pray for justice in all areas, but especially as advocates for those enslaved by greed and abuse, currently in the areas of human trafficking and immigration.

We are the voices for the oppressed.

Esther Aherne, OP
Tacoma Dominicans

April 14

Friday, Fifth Week of Lent

Jeremiah 20:10-13; John 10:31-42

The era in which Jeremiah lived, c. 600 B.C., was one of transition for the ancient Near East. Powerful nations were vying with one another for power and domination in the region. In the small kingdom of Judah God called a reluctant Jeremiah to the ministry of prophet; he then undertook the unremitting task of calling the people of the Covenant to repentance and conversion in the face of widespread idolatrous practices. Jeremiah's criticisms of the often disastrous leadership of his nation and of the priests, prophets and guardians of the Temple cult were sharp. His condemnations of false worship and social injustice as well as his predictions of impending disaster for the nation went largely unheeded. In this passage we hear Jeremiah's outcry of anguish in the face of the resistance and persecution from his own people, from political and religious leaders, from former friends, and even from his own family. And yet the prophet did not turn back from the Word that was in his heart "*as a burning fire.*" "*They will not overcome me,*" we read, . . . "*for to you, O Lord, have I committed my cause.*"

600 years later, Jesus faced similar violent opposition from his own people, speaking words that were not welcome, as his challengers refused to hear or understand words that threatened the status of an established order of things that confounded religious assumptions: "*The Father and I are One.*"

2000 years later, have things changed that much? Are we not called upon to face our own nation's idolatrous practices? Our own? Are we not called upon to question and test our own religious assumptions? Do we wait for the prophet who will speak the necessary words of challenge to turn the course of our world from its destructive paths? But what has been the fate of prophets, even in our days? "*O Lord of hosts, you who try the righteous, who see the heart and the mind. . . ,*" enlighten our own hearts and minds, each in our own lives and circumstances, with the call to repentance and conversion.

Susannah Malarkey, OP
San Rafael Dominicans



Saturday, Fifth Week of Lent

Ezekiel 37: 21-28; John 11: 45-57

God has a dream for the Jewish people, for all peoples and for us. Ezekiel sees the vision and records it for all who live after him. If we study it closely, we see God's dream is lived out by Jesus, who repeats this dream as he shares life with his disciples. The dream/vision is simple:

Nations will be gathered with their own once again,
God will be the one ruler over all,
They will be unified people living in peace,
Having only one shepherd to guide them,
 God's decrees and statutes will be their security,
They will inherit the land of their ancestors for all time,
God's everlasting covenant with us is one of peace for all,
They will flourish with God's sanctuary in their midst,
 experiencing God's presence in all they do,
Because God is their God, they are God's people.



This is not only a dream of the past; this was Jesus' dream for his time and for all who followed him. This is our dream today and the goal of the whole Lenten season. Today is the last day of Lent before Holy Week begins. Lent has achieved its fullness. God shares with us the vision for us to live into it throughout the rest of our lives. How grateful are our hearts, that God wants only the best for us.

What dream/vision do I have for the future for all those about whom I care and for myself?

As this Lent comes to an end, how do I want to live my discipleship each day for the rest of my life?

Lord Jesus, be with us as we make your dream for us real. Amen.

Mary Thorne, CSJP

Friend of Tacoma Dominican Community