

Purification and Enlightenment Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the RCIA
Fifth Sunday of Lent • Year B • March 17, 2024



*God of life
and of the living,
your Son, Jesus Christ,
chose to die
so he might
free all from dying.
He gave his life
so we might
live with you forever.*

Sunday Word

Ezekiel 37:12-14

Psalm 130:1-8

Romans 8:8-11

John 11:1-45 (or 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45)

Repent

Human beings are mortal. The grave will claim our bodies even as our souls pass from this life to the next. But there is another kind of “tomb” in which we are buried, the kind created by our sinning.

We deal in death when we sin gravely. Serious sin cuts us off from the divine One, who describes himself in Sacred Scripture as “the living God.” Serious sin is called “mortal” because it does not merely stunt our growth in godliness and goodness. If unrepented, it leads us to the eternal death of hell.

For Reflection . . .

When have you felt totally hemmed in, entombed, at a dead end simply going through the motions in life? Why?

If death is a consequence of serious sin, why is sinning so attractive?

What is most frightening to you about death?

Renew

We cannot conquer sin and death on our own. It is only through the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross that we are set free from the power of sin. The sting of death is removed so that our dying becomes a threshold, a passing over into the eternal life of Heaven.

Death is transformed by God’s love, which is offered to us in Christ. We stand firm in that love in accord with the Commandment of Jesus: We love God and our neighbor. The joy of the Lord is ours and is complete. No tomb, no earthly death can overcome our union with the living God in Christ.

For Reflection . . .

What have you found to be most life-giving during this Lenten season?

What are the most freeing aspects of faith that you have experienced during this initiation process?

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Church Teaching: Christ, Our Life

Jesus approaches the tomb of Lazarus. Emotion underscores the miracle about to take place. Three times, Scripture notes Jesus' love of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus (see John 11:3, 5, 36). Twice the Evangelist says that the Lord is "disturbed in spirit" (John 11:33, 38).

Death is inescapable. Even Lazarus, whom Jesus raised, will die yet again. In other words, death is not taken away but overcome and transcended by Christ. The miracle that takes place at Bethany acts as a prelude to the greater miracle that will take place at the tomb of the Resurrection. Jesus himself will experience death and conquer it. Death is no longer to be feared, for the voice of the Risen Lord will unlock the gates of life for all those who believe.

Christ's voice is first heard, and that "unlocking" begins even before Baptism as inquirers and catechumens respond to the Good News proclaimed by the Church. Baptism more deeply attunes us to the voice of the One who calls to us in love. In those sacred waters we are incorporated into Christ completely. We are immersed into the mystery of his dying and rising.

God is faithful to those who believe. Divine love will free us from sin and death. In Christ, the voice of God calls us out of the tombs of sin and death, speaking to us the eternal, living word of love.

Distinctiveness of Church Teaching

Saint Augustine of Hippo says, "Believe then, and though you were dead, yet shall you live; but if you do not believe, even while you are alive you are dead. . . . And how does death come to the soul? When faith is wanting."

We respond in faith to God. He who is ever faithful restores us to his friendship by the sacrifice of Christ. He frees us from every shadow of death so that we might take our place in the new creation and praise him in Christ, our Risen Lord.

Key Images and Symbols of the Season

THE GRAVE—fate of all humanity.

THE SON OF GOD—Jesus, the one coming into the world, overcoming and renewing it.

THE STONE—sin, which weighs us down and entombs us.

THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE—what Christ himself is and what he offers us.

THE FATHER—who hears our plea and responds in Christ through the Spirit.

Preparing for Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist

Having heard so much in the Liturgy of the Word this Sunday and having experienced powerful prayer in the Scrutiny celebration, what insights stir within you?

How do you express for yourself God's promise that you will rise with Christ?

When you hear the phrase "Christ, our Life" what does it mean to you?

