

LENT 2017

With the Lord is mercy and fullness of redemption

No human being is ever outside of God's mercy. God wants everyone, the good, the bad and the plain miserable ones.

With the Lord is mercy and fullness of redemption

The forgiveness of the cross is so great that it extends to the very depths of hell. We make this statement every Sunday that « he descended into hell. »

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We humans can block the forgiveness that Jesus gives us. God is always reaching out to those who have wandered far away.

With the Lord is mercy and fullness of redemption

Today, include in your prayer any of your relatives who do not think that God's mercy is a big deal. Pray that their spirit will be wakened up.

UNBIND HIM; LET HIM GO FREE

Too often we meet people who think that the stories from the Gospel are nice, but they belong to a bygone age. It has nothing to do with us.

On this fifth Sunday of Lent jump into the story of the raising of Lazarus. This is a sign of the resurrection that will soon be upon the disciples. They will soon discover that death and destruction are not the final word. The power of God will triumph in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The death of Lazarus is an indication that sin has power in our lives. Death is always the punishment for sin when we recall the story of Adam and Eve in the Scriptures. Can death be the final word for human life? Is human life so meaningless that it collapses and disappears when we give up our last breath?

Today lift up your eyes to see that as the miracle of the raising of Lazarus happens so now each believer is meant to share the glory of the resurrection.

But before we look toward the resurrection we need to see how we too are bound and constricted in our lives. The command of Jesus is to “unbind him and let him go free.”

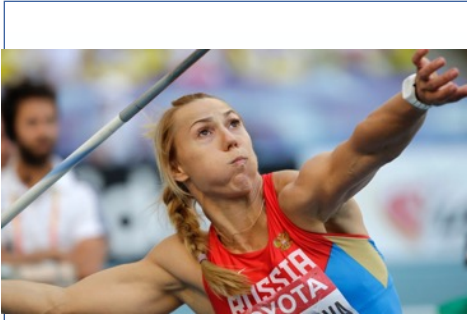
We will examine some of the ways that we need to hear the command of Jesus to be set free from our own bondage to sin, selfishness and greed.



What are the moments we can hear God? Often it will be when we have fallen flat on our face. We are caught in choosing to be vindictive and hateful with our fellow human beings. God breaks in with mercy and goodness. We are being challenged to change. This is what our journey of Lent has been: our time of turning toward the mercy and goodness of God.



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The Vision of Ezekiel (First reading)

The vision of Ezekiel to the Hebrews who were in exile for seventy years in Babylon is a revelation of great hope. These people were in deep suffering. they were in a foreign land; they were exploited and they questioned if God even cared about them.

With powerful images Exeliel tells the people that God would lift them up like dead bodies out of the grave. The pall of death would no longer hover over them. They would be given new life in their own land.

God is going to give them a new spirit. The divine spirit will bring you to life, to have freedom and peace under the protection of God.

Where do you feel the call of God to lift us to new life? to new freedom?

I can remember on Thursday mornings walking by the court house. Thursday was court day and the prison staff would park and unload the prisoners whose case was being heard on that day. These young men got out of the van with hands in cuffs and their feet chained together. This was always a sad day for I always felt that no human being should ever be in chains.

But the physical chains are a metaphor for the more serious bondage that exists within our hearts. Most often, the bondage within our hearts is much heavier and destructive of life than any metal chains on our feet can be.

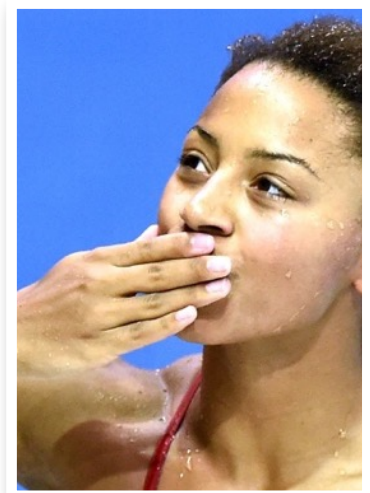
One of the most serious points of bondage is any unforgiveness within our hearts. We all know brothers or sisters who will not even talk to each other for years. There is no seeking a reconciliation. This drags on for several years and it is too difficult to ever build a new bridge. We have aged grandmothers who cry every night because their family is so divided. The bondage between two brothers places the aged mother into bondage also.

Then there is the bondage of fear at new comers. We do not

know them, they speak a different language and dress differently. We do not know them personally. We throw all kinds of obstacles to having them settle within Canada. But we do not get to know these people who are different. We are caught in fear but we are still in bondage.

Today, when we hear the story of the raising of Lazarus, bring all the other instances where we are all wrapped up in resentments, fear and misunderstanding, or in greed where we resist any sharing of our resources. Each is a form of bondage that is strangling the love and joy that should be pumping through our arteries.

Now, extend the image of bondage to our society. Where in Canada do you experience us being all tied up and unwilling to live fully as Christ wants us to live?



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Jesus wants to unbind you to live in mercy.

When we focus on the raising of Lazarus this Sunday hear the command of Jesus:

“Unbind him, let him go free.”

For us, this is a present day command. Jesus is commanding each one of us to be free of all that binds us and limits our life severely. Maybe we need to be unbound from all the resentments that we have toward our own sister whose life seems to be so successful. She had said some hurtful things about your children and the embers of resentment are still burning.

Jesus wants your spirit to be set free from any resentment and anger that ties you down. In your anger you can be very critical of your co-workers who are trying to cope and

live the best way they can. Jesus is asking that your spirit be freed of any negative judgments that prevents you from seeing what good other people are doing.

And then there is the blindness we have toward people who are not ‘making it’ in the Canadian society. We chose not to see the women who are trying to raise their children without the support of a father or larger family. This may be immigrant women who have hardly any support system to raise their kids. We just do not want to hear of their difficulties or their loneliness. We are so limited. Our heart has actually shrunk like an old fashioned wool sweater that hit the hot water in the washing machine. A shrunken heart will always degenerate into a bitter and selfish heart.

Now the freedom that Jesus gives is the freedom to see the sacredness of each human being. This is a brother or a sister that has been made in the very image of God. We are being gifted with the very heart of God to see and love this other who is different from ourselves.

We are being challenged to let go of any resentments and angers that paralyze our ability to love and find joy in human life. All the angers that we want to hold on to are being shaken. Our grip is loosening. Let go! Walk free!

When Jesus gives the command to unbind Lazarus, allow his command to apply it to your own life.

Speak, Lord, your servant is listening ...

Give me the courage to hear your commands to unbind all this keeps me from living a life of love and compassion.

Speak, Lord, your servant is listening

Give me the insight to see how you work to sett my neighbor free of his resentments and greed. You are lifting him to a life of service and joy. May I rejoice in your work in his life.

You are meant for so much more

- Your life is meant to be a joyful sharing of the love and mercy within the heart of Jesus. What Jesus is to us, the disciples, now you must be the the people of the world.

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Jesus, you are life-giving, freedom and the joy of sharing with others.

Take from my life whatever burdens me from giving of myself to the needs and suffering of others.

Take from me any excuses I make to avoid sharing my time and talents with others.

Choose the freedom that only Jesus will give

Unfortunately too many people who have been born into the Christian church see their religion as a burden. It is filled with all kinds of obligations and things that put a person down. But what if they are mistaken?

Jesus has come to bring us life and life in abundance. He has come to bring each one of us to enter into and live a wonderful friendship with God. He wants you to love God the Father with the same love and intensity that he loved God the Father. He wants each one of us to be nourished by the same sense of love and commitment that the Father gave toward him.

But we all carry a lot of baggage. We are tied down to our ego! We can be downright selfish! We avoid giving of ourselves if there 'is nothing in it for us.'

Lent 2017 can be such a wonderful gift to have Jesus 'unbind' us of our burdens.

Take that part of your life that you have the hardest time to deal with: you are burdened with a fear and dislike of people who dress differently from most Canadians. Your fear clouds the eyes of your heart from ever discovering the good in these people who are different. You need to be unbound from your fears in order to be able to love with the heart of Jesus.

Maybe there are long festering wounds from your past. You were passed over for a promotion that you had worked so hard to attain. You have always felt that the company's management shelved you to second place.

Take other parts of your life where you are burdened (and most times by choice) and ask Jesus to bind you and set your spirit free.

PRAYER FOR FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Jesus, you are the God who comes to make us authentic human beings on this earth.
 Open my mind to see how my heart is being expanded to see goodness in the people I do not like, or the people I write off as not being too important.
 You will unbind anything that hinders me from loving and doing much good on this earth.
 If I ever resist you, keep pushing me to want to be free of all sinful attitudes, greedy practices and refusing to share with the poor with their many faces.