

Fifth Sunday of Lent



*Yesterday is but a dream.
Tomorrow is only a vision.
But today well lived makes every
yesterday a dream of happiness,
and every tomorrow a vision of hope.
Look well, therefore, to this day.*

This Sanskrit proverb offers a practical attitude for living one day at a time and can help us refocus on serenity while forging a new way of life. As we continue to grow and make progress in our recovery during the season of Lent, it is valuable to assess the expectations we hold toward God, where we align our hope, and the spiritual hunger that remains. This week's Sunday Mass Readings challenge us to consider elements of life, death, faith, and attachment.

Saint Paul references a contrast between *flesh* and *spirit* in this Sunday's Second Reading. We commonly associate the word *flesh* with our bodies and *spirit* with our soul—as if the spirit is pure and the flesh is corrupt. Consistent with Jewish thought, Saint Paul does not portray humans as having two separable parts, but understands that *all* of a person acts spiritually or of the flesh on a given occasion.

How is behavior of the flesh different than that of the spirit? Put simply, it is behavior that is *attached* or *addicted*. We act of the flesh when we put a thing or a person in God's place. For many of us, this resembled placing the pursuit of a behavior or substance (such as alcohol, drugs, food, money, lust, or the approval of others) above the pursuit of God. We treat things like they're people and people like they're things. Often, those people get fed up and retaliate.

Over time, this process leaves us feeling dead inside. Our emotions dry up, and all that is left is the zombie-like desire for the things that don't really fill us. Outside of our addictions, we can fall into this pattern when we put our hope in the human powers of this world to save us. In our loneliness, we might even ask why we've been abandoned by God.

The story of Lazarus in this Sunday's Gospel Reading shines a light on this shared experience. Some people who saw Jesus mourn for Lazarus asked, "Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?"

Despite our short-term vision and tendency to rely on our limited human strength, God cares. Like Lazarus, we were tied up and bounded by our addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments. They began as a way to cope with the world around us and ultimately brought us to a spiritual death. Our only hope is a spiritual awakening promised by the Twelve Steps of recovery and the sacramental life of the Church. Our solution is characterized by a total dependence on God.

The freedom we find in Jesus is lasting and compels us to share the same with others. We must remain honest, open, and willing if we are to find relief from our own expectations of what the world should look like. Failure to do so will leave us resentful, afraid, and stuck in our own anxiety. Over time, our self-reliance will lead us back to the fatal cycle of addiction and attachment.

We cannot change yesterday and tomorrow is not promised. All things, including our faith and recovery, are a gift from God. Like Lazarus, Jesus cares enough to breathe new life into us so that we may properly order our lives and share the good news with others.

Reflection Questions

- How have you adapted to changes in the world around you during the course of your recovery?
 - What unique opportunities exist today that were not always present to you?
- What did it take for you to realize that you had a problem with addiction and needed God's help?
- What spiritual tools and practices help relieve you of expectations put on God and other people?

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Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Ezekiel 37:12-14

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

Second Reading: Romans 8:8-11

Gospel: John 11:1-45