

- ◇ How and when have you felt somewhat like Lazarus, bound and trapped in the tomb?
- ◇ How and when have you been part of the crowd, standing around and watching rather than responding to need?
- ◇ We may have had moments or experiences in our lives which have led us to answer as Martha answered, “Yes, Lord. I believe”. How has this transformed us?

RESPOND (15 minutes)

No sharing would be complete without a commitment to putting our faith in practice. You may like to share what you have decided upon and /or keep a record of your response.

- ◇ In what ways is your parish a life giving place? Consider ways in which these might be developed.
- ◇ Spend some time meditating on the Stations of the Cross, pondering on the faces of the people that surround Jesus on this journey, but focusing on the central face, the face of Christ himself.

Closing Prayer

The leader, or another member of the group, then leads the group in the closing prayer.

God of Life and Love, inspire us to be prophetic witnesses to Christ, the resurrection and the life.

Help us to break free from all that binds us,

all that prevents us from living out the call of our baptism.

Open our hearts to be transformed by your invitation to new life.

Give us the courage to respond and the wisdom to know how.

Through Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, forever and ever. Amen.



Diocese of Westminster

Agency for Evangelisation

<http://rcdow.org.uk/faith/small-groups/>

LENT 2017

Proclaim Westminster
building missionary parishes



Week Five, Meeting Mercy *The Raising of Lazarus*

GATHER (30 mins)

Living our faith

If you wish, share something of how last week's session has influenced your thoughts and actions.

Opening prayer

Grant, almighty God, through our yearly observance of Lent, that we may grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ and by worthy conduct pursue their effects.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

LISTEN TO EXPERIENCE/Living our faith

Take a few minutes to read the following reflection silently or aloud

Many of us have stood at a funeral, faced an open grave, watched the curtains close around a coffin, buried the ashes of one we loved. We know what it's like to feel the turmoil of emotions that come with that experience. We may have spent time with someone suffering the illness that will end in death, may have been the one who cared for someone suffering. Or we may have had the shock of a sudden death. Often these experiences have changed us in some way, have made us look at life – and death – differently.

Pope Francis tells us, “...we see the particular importance of the

moment of death. The Church has always experienced this dramatic passage in the light of Christ's resurrection, which opened the way to the certainty of the life to come. ... Yet death must be faced and prepared for as a painful and inescapable passage, yet one charged with immense meaning, for it is the ultimate act of love towards those we leave behind and towards God whom we go forth to meet." (*Misericordia et Misera* 15)

Take a few moments of silence to reflect on the following question, and then share your thoughts.

Share

Recall your own experiences of illness and death of those you love, thinking particularly of your reactions and emotions .

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES (45 minutes)

Instructions: Some time before the next meeting, the leader may ask a member of a group to read the Gospel for the fifth Sunday of Lent Year A.

Gospel: John 11:3-7.17-27.33-45

Take some time for silent reflection after the Scripture passage is read; then read the following reflection silently or aloud.

This Gospel of the Fifth Sunday of Lent is our last step on the journey towards the events of Holy Week, the culmination of a series of Sunday gospels touching on choices, on change, on water, on light and on life – a reflection on our baptismal journey, and the journey of our catechumens, now the Elect, towards Baptism at the Easter Vigil. This week, we encounter the tomb of Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha, and a friend of Jesus. In just two weeks we will be at another tomb, an empty one, singing alleluias, in faith, at the joy of resurrection.

Themes of glory and belief run through this passage. Jesus says, 'This sickness will end not in death but in God's glory, and through it the Son of God will be glorified.' Martha, on being told that her brother 'will rise again', says, almost like a lesson learnt, 'I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus' reply: "I am the resurrection. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and

believes in me will never die...' offers a challenge to Martha, to face, to recognise, to articulate who Jesus is. She does not fail, all her experiences, conversations, observations of Jesus have led her to say, "Yes, Lord, I believe ..."

So much of our own human experience of loss is here. Jesus, manifesting the humanity that we often fail to recognise, is in "great distress", he sighs from the heart and finally weeps.

Let us never allow ourselves to be robbed of the hope born of faith in the Risen Lord. We are often sorely tested, but we must never lose our certainty of the Lord's love for us. His mercy finds expression also in the closeness, affection and support that many of our brothers and sisters can offer us at times of sadness and affliction. The drying of tears is one way to break the vicious circle of solitude in which we often find ourselves trapped.

Maybe in this narrative we see what have been our own first steps in being able to respond to the challenges living the Christian life offers us. If I have a sure and certain faith that Jesus IS the resurrection and the life, and that, because of that, all the glory of God is revealed to me, I will have the courage, strength and determination to live as Christ as shown me to live. When Jesus says "Unbind him, let him free" perhaps we can see ourselves too in Lazarus. What are the bands that bind us?

What temptations, secrets, blindness, fears prevent us from the life that Jesus calls us to live. Maybe grief, anxiety, resentments, practical problems of life have held us in the tomb. Jesus calls to us too today "Come out", be set free. And what of the crowd that surrounds this action, trying to work out what's going on? Some are brought to belief, others to questioning and rejection. Have we been part of that crowd too, helping to release 'Lazarus' and going back to our lives transformed, believing, experiencing new life – or being critical, suspicious, cynical?

REFLECT

Take a few moments of silence to reflect on the following questions, then share your reflections.