

# Encountering the Sacred Mysteries

BULLETIN SUPPLEMENT OF LITURGICAL CATECHESIS



FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

## THE PALL



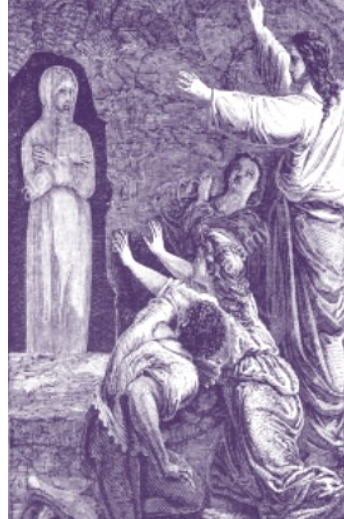
**A pall is simply a large cloth that covers the casket. The pall helps the congregation focus on the worship of God and the hope of the resurrection by deemphasizing the relative expense of coffins and showing the equality of all people in Christ. The white color of the pall reminds those assembled of their faith in the resurrection and further symbolizes putting on the robe of Christ's righteousness in baptism.**

## Out of the Depths

Based on  
Psalm 130

It is striking to me that, once again, the readings for today's liturgy resonate with our current situation in which most of us are probably feeling worried, anxious, fearful, and perhaps a little "entombed" as we have been asked to stay at home and keep our distance from the people and places we regularly visit. The common theme among all the readings is life, death, and hope in God's power to save. However, our "hope" in the Lord right now might be overshadowed by the chaos being created by the COVID-19 virus that is reeking havoc upon the world. It seems that we are hearing of more and more cases appearing across our country and the valiant efforts being made to slow it down and control the spread of an "invisible" enemy. Additionally, the care of those who have become seriously ill with the virus appears to be daunting! The words of today's Psalm could very well be the prayer on the lips and in the hearts of everyone right now: "Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; LORD, hear my voice! Let

your ears be attentive to my voice in supplication." It doesn't get any more real than that! I find it interesting



**"This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."**

~John 11:4

that the Psalmist uses the word *depths* to express his feelings. His cry (like all of ours) comes from the depths of his being. He is pleading with God to hear his voice and to respond. That's precisely what all of us are longing for during this pandemic! Bernhard Anderson, Old Testament scholar, observes, "In the poet's speech, the word "depths" reverberates with

the mythical overtones of the abyss of watery chaos, the realm of the powers of confusion, darkness, and death that are arrayed against the sovereign power of God. To be drawn into the realm of chaos (the sphere of death) is to be separated from the world in which people praise God and find fulfillment in the worshiping community." Professor Anderson wrote those prophetic words twenty-four years before his death in 2007. I very much relate to this image of chaos and confusion that separates me from the worshiping community right now! It is a lonely and disconnected feeling! Interestingly, when this Psalm was written, the Jewish understanding of death was not only limited to the biological event that occurs when the heart stops beating and consciousness ceases. Death's power was also felt in the midst of life to the degree that one experiences any weakening of personal vitality through illness, handicap, or imprisonment. Any threat to a person's welfare, peace, or wellbeing, that is one's freedom to be and to participate in the community, is understood as an invasion of the kingdom of death into the world. How very applicable to our current situation where we're *continued on the back*



"Indeed we ought to say that, bursting through all things, [our cries] reach the ears of God, since the ears of God were in the heart of him who prayed. For where has not he God been present, whose voice is faithful? ~St. Augustine

*"The Passion of Jesus is a sea of sorrows, but it is also an ocean of love. Ask the Lord to teach you to fish in this ocean. Dive into its depth. No matter how deep you go, you will never reach the bottom."*  
~St. Paul of the Cross

"the Depths" continued from the front...

being asked to refrain from participation with our community's worship and watch Mass on TV or through the internet. I also can't help but feel a connection to Martha in today's Gospel when she says to Jesus, "Lord, if only you had been here..." I love the words on Martha's lips. They are the unspoken words in all of our hearts, especially when things apparently go wrong and we do not understand. The "if only" questions lie at the heart and at the cross-

roads of everybody's life. Nevertheless, despite my own feelings of uncertainty, I can't ignore Jesus' own assessment of the situation in the Gospel: "This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God." I believe this is the answer that God Himself is giving in response to our deep cries pleading for relief from our suffering. We, like the Psalmist, are waiting on the Lord to act. Although everything around us has been significantly altered and our daily life interrupted, can we—with the ear of our

heart—hear the Lord's comforting words ("This illness is...for the glory of God) and apply it to our circumstances? Like the Psalmist, we might dare to place all our dependence and confidence in God by praying: "I trust in the LORD; my soul trusts in his word." Let us also not forget that God's Word is none other than the One who became flesh and makes His dwelling among us and who declares to all of us today: "I am the resurrection and the life." How will we respond to the question Jesus asked Martha: "Do you believe this?"

## Passiontide

In the 1962 calendar (and before), Lent had a division, so that the last two weeks was considered "Passiontide"—time more focused on the passion and death of Christ. The Fifth Sunday of Lent was called "Passion Sunday." This was when the images were covered. Even in the revised

liturgy, these last two weeks, especially Holy Week, the Church continues to dwell more closely on the sufferings of Christ, but the name of Passiontide was removed. Because of the custom of veiling crucifixes and statues in the church before Mass on the fifth Sunday of Lent, this



Sunday was called "Black Sunday" in Germany, where the veils, which elsewhere were generally violet, were of black color. In John's Gospel, it was the raising of Lazarus, that sealed Jesus' fate by the Sanhedrin who planned to kill him during Passover.

## Pray the Liturgy

"It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord. For as true man he wept for Lazarus his friend and as eternal God raised him from the tomb just as, taking pity on the human race, he leads us by sacred mysteries to new life."

(Preface to the Eucharistic Prayer for the Fifth Sunday in Lent)

### TO PONDER:

- ◆ Jesus said, "Blessed are they who mourn for they will be comforted," Is there anything that I could do to comfort someone who is in mourning?
- ◆ How can I make my experience of the sacraments, more meaningful?
- ◆ How have I experienced a new life in Christ?



"The tomb became a womb, and as a womb giving birth, thus from the tomb arose the newly-formed Lazarus."

~St. John Chrysostom