

Lectionary readings: Ezekiel 37: 1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8: 6-11; John 11: 1-45 (5th Sunday in Lent)

For reflection and prayer

- **Ezekiel 37:** The people of Israel are in exile. They are dried up emotionally and spiritually; all hope is gone; they are in despair; the life has gone out of them. Ezekiel's message is one of hope and new life for Israel and for us. God Himself will breathe His life into Israel and into us. The dry bones represent our spiritual dryness and deadness. We all go through times of dryness when our faith seems to falter and we wonder if we can go on with our spiritual journey. It's at times like these that we can cry out to God in our dryness, doubt and despair. There is no such thing as a hopeless situation with God. Whatever we are feeling this week, let's acknowledge our need and ask God to breathe new life into us to renew and refresh us.
- **Psalm 130:** I'm sure we have all been in the depths of despair, not once, but many times. And we have cried out to God to forgive us and free us of our guilt. The Psalmist assures us that God is always ready to forgive us, for He is Love. Perhaps we don't doubt that God will forgive us; but we are not sure that the person we have hurt will forgive us; and we find it difficult to forgive ourselves. There is no easy answer to the last two, except coming to God and asking for grace, as we face up to ourselves as we are, imperfect, broken people, yet each one chosen by God and precious to God - so much so that He wants us to know that His

love for us is unconditional. How does this speak to us where we are?

- **Romans 8:** v6: *'Obsession with self ... is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life.'* v7: *'Focusing on the self is the opposite of focusing on God.'* v11: *'When God lives and breathes in you, you are delivered from that dead life.'* (The Message) Are we living a 'dead' life or are we in a spacious place, set free to be who we truly are? What do you understand by a 'spacious life'? Are your thoughts self-centred or God-centred? Much to reflect on here as we continue our spiritual journey.
- **John 11:** Here we see Jesus sharing the pain of Martha and Mary, identifying with them in their loss and sense of desolation. This is the God we worship - a God who is moved by our tears, a God who shares our pain, a God who is always with us, even though we may not feel His presence. This is a story about God giving us new life here and now, setting us free from the things we get hooked on e.g. our compulsions, our patterns of behaviour, setting us free from the things that spoil our lives e.g. selfishness, holding on to the past, our fears and anxieties, our guilt etc. Eternal life begins here and now. God wants to open up the 'tombs' we have confined ourselves in. Let's hear Jesus call us out of our 'tomb' this week, whatever it is. And let's allow others to help us out of our 'straitjackets' and emerge into the freedom of the children of God which is what we are. It might be good for us to reflect on what our particular 'tomb' is and what the 'grave clothes' are that we find ourselves wrapped in which prevent us from being our true selves and fulfilling our full potential.