

Date: March 22, 2026 (Lent 5)

1. Texts: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Ps. 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: genuine life in the Holy Spirit.
4. Aim: encourage.
5. Proposition: "God wills us all to receive his full and genuine life in the Spirit."

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Imagine that the reading from Ezekiel had been filmed by Steven Spielberg.

The prophet Ezekiel stands on a sandy and rocky plain. Before him stretches uncounted skeletons, whose bones have been broken apart and scattered. Ezekiel raises his arms and cries out to the dry and lifeless skeletons.

Dramatic
reading.



Arise, O ye lost people of Israel! Arise, O ye empty lives and dry bones. Be ye bound together, bone to bone. Be ye tied together with sinews and tendons. Be ye covered with muscle, flesh and skin. Stand, all ye lost ones of God's people. And receive the breath of God's own life!

The bones rattle and shake, making a dry, whispering sound. They clatter, bone upon bone, as they come together. Sinews and tendons spring from the heart of the bones, tying bone upon bone. Muscle, flesh, skin ooze from the now complete skeletons. Before Ezekiel stands an army—a lifeless army, an inanimate army. Ezekiel extends his arms towards the lifeless people and breathes upon them. A mighty wind blows through the people. They shudder and gasp as they breathe in the breath of God.

You are God's own people, empowered by his own life and breath. God himself has put his Spirit within you and you now live his life upon this dry earth. You are the people of God!

If only Steven Spielberg had filmed such a scene for us today. Listen to me.

You are God's own people. You have already received the breath of God, whether you recognize it or not. Whether you realize it or not. You are God's people.

So, when and how did this happen? When did you move from outside God's Spirit to having God's Spirit in you?

For most of us, it happened at our baptisms. It was then that the Holy Spirit moved into our human spirits. For most of us, our parents gave God permission to take up residence in our spirits and each of us was made one of God's own people.

For some of us, we invited God into our lives prior to baptism. The result was the same. God's Holy Spirit moved into our human spirits and we, too, were made people of God.

But even the Spielberg version of Ezekiel's vision doesn't tell us what happens after the people have been recreated. Even St. Peter's version doesn't make the aftermath clear.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.¹

The reality is this: even God's own people need renewal from time to time. Yes, God's Spirit fills our human spirits, but we frequently neglect our spirit's spiritual health. The refreshing waters of God's Holy Spirit evaporate over time. Our spiritual carelessness and neglect dry out the waters of our spiritual life. Over time, our spiritual lives can resemble the dry bones of Ezekiel's vision.

We refresh our spiritual lives through prayer, study of Scripture and sharing in the holy eucharist. Please don't become too bogged down with trying to do all this in the one right way. The method of your prayer, Bible study and holy communion doesn't matter as much as the interior reality. We converse with God using whatever words and means. We share with him our concerns, fears

¹ 1 Peter 2:9-10.

and hopes. We learn Scripture through guides such as “Daily Bread” or through formal study groups. We share in communion as frequently as we can. We renew our spirits through Scripture, reason and tradition. With these sources we refresh our connections with God’s Holy Spirit who resides in us.

Yet, even now some of you are doubting your connection with God through the Holy Spirit. You want to believe it all to be true. But you suspect your own value in God’s eyes. You know you don’t always live up to his expectations. Perhaps you have done that which is wrong in his sight, and you now think that his Spirit must surely have abandoned you.

But you forget your spiritual beginnings. It was not you who pulled the Holy Spirit into your life through a door that you opened. It was not your good deeds that opened the channel through which you ushered the Spirit into your failing human spirit.

God moved into your life. God knocked on the door to your spirit and he’s the one who walked in. God took the initiative. He was the one who called out to you. Think of Ezekiel.

Then [God] said to [Ezekiel], “Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.”²

It is God who inhabits our spirits. It is God who refreshes his presence in our lives. It is God who saves us and not we ourselves. We are his people and the sheep of his pasture.³

Do not doubt God’s ability to love and forgive you.

² Ezekiel 37:4-6.

³ Psalm 100.

From more than 500 years before the birth of Jesus, Ezekiel speaks out to us today. His message of hope and new life was originally intended for the Israelites taken into captivity in Babylon. But that message touches our spirits today.

You are God's own people, empowered by God's own life and breath. God himself has put his Spirit within you and you now live his life upon this dry earth. You are the people of God!

AMEN.