

Living the Word

Ezekiel 37.1-14

How important it is for us to hear this prophecy as we journey through the tough weeks of Lent. We might consider ourselves as dry bones during this period of preparation. But we must always keep in mind the reason we have given something up or taken something on during this period. The breath that God instructs the prophet to give to the bones is exactly the breather that we receive at the Resurrection. The pneuma which moves over the waters during Creation, the Word made flesh, here among us. Shouldn't we remember that for all of the time we might struggle with our faith, the Lord is constantly renewing and refreshing us through the sacraments? The dry bones are still us, and the Lord is the breath, putting flesh onto our faith and our lives. May we always hold onto this during every Lenten season.

Elements of the Mass

Altar Frontals and Coverings

The first specific reference to altar coverings occurs in the 9th century, when it was expected that an altar would be covered with three cloths. In England from 1552 onwards the *Book of Common Prayer* has directed more simply that 'a fair white linen cloth' be placed on the altar 'at Communion time', and in 1969 the canons of the Roman Catholic Church reduced the required altar cloth to one. A frontal is a panel of embroidered cloth placed in front of an altar or covering it completely (the latter style being known in England as a 'Laudian' frontal after Archbishop Laud who promoted its use). The Canons of the Church of England of 1604 direct that the 'Lord's Table' should be 'covered in time of Divine Service with a carpet of silk or other decent stuff', presumably underneath the 'fair white linen cloth' during the celebration of the Eucharist. The Roman Missal of 1570 directed that the frontal should follow the liturgical colour of the season or day 'where possible', (matching that the vestments of the sacred ministers) and this has become widespread Anglican practice since the late 19th century.

29th March
2020

Fifth Sunday
of Lent
(Passiontide begins)

The Tears



'Jesus wept' (John 11.35) is the shortest verse in the New Testament. Contemplation of these tears reveals first of all the tender compassion of Jesus. He mourns with those who mourn and weeps with those who weep. These tears too anticipate the tears of the Passion. Jesus stands outside the cave where Lazarus lies with the stone sealing the entrance and anticipates his own burial and all that must precede it. He foresees betrayal by a friend, desertion by his disciples, rejection by the crowd, and cruelty at the hands of his executioners. As he stands and weeps he still calls upon his Heavenly Father. When he calls to Lazarus 'come forth', he calls forth the hope of a new heaven and new earth where God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. All that is to come is the price he pays to open up that place of peace for us.

O Sing Unto the Lord

The Passiontide hymn *Drop, drop, slow tears* (NEH 82) is a short, but rather lovely hymn taken from Phineas Fletcher's *Piscatorie Eclogs and other Poetical Miscellanies* (1633), where it is a short six-line poem entitled 'An Hymne'. The last verse in particular brings the vision of Christ's passion back to us, as we are called to stand at the foot of the Cross anew on this Passion Sunday. Born in Kent, Fletcher served as a parish priest in Derbyshire and Norfolk. Usually sung to *Song 46* by Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625), the simple melody is particularly suitable for its touching simplicity and emotional range. The hymn is also sometimes sung as an anthem using the tune of Gibbons' popular madrigal *The Silver Swan*, which shares the same meter of words.