

I'm going to begin the homily today by asking two questions. The **first** is this – and it's a big one: what part or parts of your life feel like they might be buried in a grave? Perhaps a certain relationship in your life feels dead; maybe the grave of grief, or of guilt, of fear, shame, or even self-worth. Whatever graves come to mind, hold them very loosely and we'll come back to them in a few minutes. The **second** question is this: have you ever had the experience of **really** needing to **know** that God is real. I remember a specific time in my life when I was beginning to **know** that I needed to change. I wasn't getting on with other people, but I didn't **know** why. I remember going for a bike ride one morning and praying – but not really expecting a reply: “Lord, I really need to **know** you're real at this time.” It was a cloudy, gloomy old morning, which kind of matched my mood, but about five minutes into the ride, I looked up and saw a perfectly formed rectangle in the clouds with the sun shining through. Now there's no such thing as straight lines in nature, but through this perfectly formed rectangle, Jesus Himself seemed to be saying, “Here I am. I love you. I am with you.” It was **exactly** what I needed and became an intimate experience by which I **know** that God is real and deeply present - **especially** during difficult parts of my life.

The word '**know**' – k n o w – is the key word today. To come to **know** something is what happens in our minds when we receive valuable information. It's the mental **substance** we gain when we experience something, and is a significant step beyond what we believe simply because we've been told. This is where we're really lucky in the Catholic faith because through the Sacraments – which employ our five senses – we can **know** that God is real and **know** what God is doing.

Through the **waters** of Baptism, for example, we're washed clean and given new life; through Confirmation, we're anointed with **oil** and receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit; and in the Eucharist, we're nourished **with** and get to **eat** the **bread** of life – Jesus' actual Body. The **challenge** with the Sacraments though – particularly in the case of Eucharist – is that because we do the same thing **over** and **over** we often become immune to the awe and wonder of God's tangible presence. It often takes a powerful encounter with Jesus Himself for our faith to grow **from** being something **we** faithfully do and believe **to** what we are coming to **know** because our mental substance or **knowing** has increased.

What does God say **twice** in our first reading? “I am going to open your graves and raise you from your graves, my people. And you will – what? - **know** that I am the Lord when I have said and done this.” In the Hebrew language of the Old Testament, the word ‘know’ is ‘**yada**’ – y a d a – and means **deep, intimate** and **experiential** knowledge. As the Creation story in Genesis chapter 4 says, “Now Adam **knew** his wife Eve, and she conceived and born Cain.”

Let's come back to those graves you thought about a few minutes ago and are hopefully holding **loosely**. Sometimes we hold on to parts of our lives that don't serve us **tightly** because they give us identity, but in order for God to open and raise us from our graves, we need to be prepared to let them go. In the case of a deceased loved one, not to forget them, but to let go of grief; in the case of a relationship scared by hurt, to realise that letting go doesn't release them, but releases us; and in the case of guilt, to let go by seeking the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which we celebrate 9am every Saturday morning.

In the Gospel, Jesus calls out to Lazarus by name — and today, He calls out to each one of us by name: “*Come out; come out of the*

grave.” Lazarus came out of a physical tomb but **today** Jesus calls you — personally — out of whatever grave you named at the beginning. Out of grief. Out of guilt. Out of fear. Out of shame. Out of whatever has been holding you bound. And this is the key: He doesn’t **just** want you to believe this – He wants you to **know** it. To *experience* His voice. To *hear* Him call your name. To *know* that He is real, that He is near, and that He has the power to bring you back to life. **Today. Right now.**

And so, very shortly, I’m going to lead you in an individual prayer experience which offers the opportunity to be free from our graves. I’m going to ask you to do three things. To close your eyes and block out all distractions; to pray, “Lord help me to come out of the grave of \_\_\_\_\_ (whatever it is that came to mind at the start), and then to actively listen with the ears of your heart to the first **thought, word, image** or **action** that is given to you after making the prayer. If it leads to peace, love, or reconciliation, you will **know** what it is that God wants you to **do** to be free from that grave. If you don't receive anything, ask again, “Lord help me to come out of the grave of \_\_\_\_\_ (x, y or z). We're going to do this for about 30 seconds.

So, in this moment of grace, I invite you to close your eyes and centre yourself... to consciously block out all distractions.... and to pray, “Lord, help me to come out of the grave of \_\_\_\_\_,” and then, opening the ears of your heart, seek to notice what's given, and to trust that God may be inviting you into something specific. **(Wait 15 seconds...)** “Lord help me to come out of the grave of \_\_\_\_\_.”

At the end of Mass, Prayer Teams will be available (over here) to help you pray about what you received.