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Wednesday of the 4th Week of Lent

Date: Wednesday, April 2, 2025 | **Season:** Lent | **Year:** C
First Reading: Isaiah 49:8–15
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 145:8–9, 13c–14, 17–18 | **Response:** Psalm 145:8a
Gospel Acclamation: John 11:25a–26
Gospel Reading: John 5:17–30
Preached at: the Chapel of the Most Holy Name, Kolvenbach House **in the** Archdiocese of Lusaka, Zambia**.**

In the midst of this Lenten season, as we journey toward the renewal of Easter, we encounter readings that challenge us to look deeper—to recognize the presence of God not only in grand works of salvation but in the intimate, tender love that sustains all of creation. Today, Isaiah, the psalmist, and Jesus himself invite us to understand the power of life-giving love: a love that reaches even to the depths of death, bringing life where none seemed possible.

Isaiah's prophecy rings out with the promise of restoration. He speaks to a people weary from exile, who have known the bitter taste of abandonment, of being forgotten by their God. "Does a woman forget her baby at the breast, / or fail to cherish the child of her womb?" God asks. The people of Israel are struggling to see that God's covenant love will never be broken. They wonder if their suffering means they have been forsaken. But the divine answer is unequivocal: even should a mother forget, God will never forget. In a world where abandonment and neglect are all too real, where people experience the pain of being invisible to society, God's love stands as an unwavering promise. For the exiled Israelites, this is a call to hope, a reminder that no matter how deep the valley of despair, the light of God's love will shine through.

The image of a mother's love is not accidental; it speaks to something primal and powerful. In the ancient world, a mother's love was often the most tangible image of care and protection, one that could never be broken. Isaiah draws upon this imagery to say that, even if human love falters, divine love never will. This is the love that restores, the love that frees, the love that brings life to the dead. As we read these words, we are reminded of God's unshakable commitment to his people—and, by extension, to each one of us.

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The psalmist affirms this image of God's tender care: "The Lord is kind and full of compassion." This is not a God who reacts in haste or anger. This is a God whose mercy extends to all who call upon him, a God who responds not with retribution, but with compassion. In our world today, where so many suffer from injustice, poverty, and marginalization, the psalm is a reminder that God's justice is not blind; it is a justice rooted in mercy, in a deep love that does not count the cost but seeks the well-being of all. God's love is a refuge, a shelter for the oppressed, a refuge for the weary.

This theme of divine love, a love that never forgets, comes into sharp focus in the Gospel of John. Jesus speaks with authority, declaring that the Father has entrusted him with the power to give life. "The hour is coming," Jesus says, "when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and all who hear it will live." In these words, we see not only the promise of resurrection, but also the declaration that Jesus is the source of life. Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: he is the one who brings new life to the dead, the one who restores what was broken.

But here, the tension begins. In the first reading, the people of Israel hear this promise and rejoice. In the Gospel, however, the response is not one of joy but of anger. The Jewish authorities, confronted with the audacious claim of Jesus, seek to kill him. Why? Because, as Jesus says, "My Father goes on working, and so do I." Jesus is aligning himself with the Father in a way that is both radical and revolutionary. To claim to do the work of God, to act as God acts, is not just to heal the sick or perform miracles—it is to declare that God's very essence, his love and life, flows through him.

Jesus' words and works stir up a deep challenge for us today. The love that Isaiah speaks of, the mercy and grace that the psalmist extols, the life that Jesus promises—these are not abstract theological concepts. They are deeply personal. They demand a response from us. In the context of Lent, we are invited to examine where we experience death in our lives: death in our relationships, in our communities, in our souls. And we are called to respond by seeking the life that only Christ can give.

On this day, we also celebrate the memory of St. Francis of Paola, a humble hermit who lived a life hidden from the world, yet radiant with the light of divine love. St. Francis withdrew from the world not out of fear or indifference, but out of a deep desire to be wholly available to God. In his solitude, he cultivated a

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heart open to God's mercy and became, paradoxically, a source of healing and hope for others. People were drawn to him—not because of worldly power or eloquence, but because they recognized in him someone who had been transformed by divine love.

St. Francis' life reminds us that the path of holiness does not require fame or applause. It requires fidelity. It requires a willingness to let God's love so fill us that even in silence, even in hiddenness, we radiate Christ to others. He reminds us that contemplative intimacy with God is not escape—it is engagement at the deepest level. The power of his intercession and witness challenges us to make space for God in our lives, to allow divine love to work in us and through us.

In a world that often prizes action over stillness, noise over silence, and visibility over humility, the hermit's witness is needed more than ever. Lent is a season when we are invited to step back, to slow down, and to enter more deeply into communion with the God who never forgets us.

In the context of Zambia, where many face the realities of poverty, injustice, and inequality, this call takes on concrete form. How can we be people of both contemplation and compassion? How can we bring life to those who are suffering, not merely by doing more, but by being more deeply rooted in Christ?

In closing, I invite you to reflect on these questions:

- Where in my life do I need to experience the resurrection that Christ offers?
- How can I be a source of life to those around me, especially the marginalized and forgotten?
- In what ways am I being called to deepen my interior life, so that God's love may overflow into my actions?

May the witness of St. Francis of Paola, and the grace of this Lenten season, help us to receive and respond to God's life-giving love—a love that restores, renews, and never forgets.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.

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