



Saturday of the 5th Week of Lent



Date: Saturday, April 12, 2025 | **Season:** Lent | **Year:** C

First Reading: Ezekiel 37:21–28

Responsorial Psalm: Jeremiah 31:10–13 | **Response:** Jeremiah 31:10d

Gospel Acclamation: Ezekiel 18:31

Gospel Reading: John 11:45–56

Preached at: the Chapel of the Most Holy Name, Kolvenbach House in the Archdiocese of Lusaka, Zambia.

As we reflect on today’s readings—the last before Palm Sunday—we find ourselves standing on the threshold of Holy Week, invited into a vision of unity that is both ancient and urgently present.

The prophet Ezekiel speaks into the heartbreak of exile. He dares to declare that God will bring back His scattered people—not only from geographical dispersion, but from the deeper disintegration of their identity. “I will gather them,” God says, “and they shall be one.” This isn’t just a political reunification; it’s a healing of what has been broken, a restoration of covenant and community.

Imagine them—exiled Israelites—longing for home, their songs of Zion turning to silence by the rivers of Babylon. Into that ache comes the voice of God, promising not just return, but reconciliation. That promise is not ancient history. It speaks to every fractured family, every wounded people, every divided nation. It speaks to us.

And then, in the Gospel, that promise begins to take flesh—though in the most unexpected of ways.

Caiaphas, high priest and political pragmatist, declares, “It is better that one man should die for the people.” He thinks he is saving the nation from Rome. What he doesn’t know is that he is proclaiming the mystery of salvation. In trying to preserve the nation, he sets in motion the death that will reconcile all nations.

What Caiaphas intends as a cold calculation becomes, in the providence of God, the warm heartbeat of redemption. The scattered children of God will be gathered—but not by force or fear. They will be gathered by the Cross.

As we prepare to enter Holy Week, with Palm Sunday just hours away, this moment in the Lenten journey asks something deeper of us. Lent has been a season of return—a call to come back to God with all our heart. And now, the road turns toward Jerusalem, where Jesus enters not in glory, but in vulnerability. The unity spoken of by Ezekiel, the sacrifice foreshadowed in Caiaphas' words, the love poured out in the lives of saints—all of it converges in the Cross we will soon contemplate. Lent does not end in ashes or penance alone. It culminates in a procession—Palm branches in hand, hearts divided yet yearning for peace—toward the One who gathers us through His Passion.

This vision of gathering—of unity out of brokenness—has echoed through the lives of saints. Two Jesuits in particular, remembered today, help us understand what it means to live the unity Christ brings. The first was canonised on this day in 1671, whilst the second was beatified only 15 years ago in 2010.

St. Francis Borgia was born into Spanish nobility, a man of power, wealth, and titles. But when faced with death—when he accompanied the body of the Empress Isabella and saw her beauty reduced to decay—he made a radical choice: “I will never again serve a mortal king.” He renounced all he had and joined the Society of Jesus.

In a world defined by status, he chose service. In a time marked by division, he chose reconciliation. His conversion reminds us that God's gathering begins in the heart. When we lay down pride, privilege, and self-interest, we make room for others. We begin to live the unity that Christ died to offer.

And then there is Blessed Bernardo de Hoyos, a young Jesuit scholastic who burned with love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus. At just 24, he died—but not before receiving a profound mystical experience: he heard Christ say, “I will reign in Spain.”

That was no call to political conquest. It was a promise of love's reign over hatred, mercy over division. Bernardo believed that Christ's Heart burns to unite all people—not in theory, but in reality. His life, though short, is a reminder to

the young, to the fervent, to the dreamers: God still speaks, and God still gathers. Even now.

In Zambia, and in so many parts of our world today, we are not unfamiliar with division—tribal, political, economic. The call of today's readings is urgent: be gathered. Be reconciled. And not just spiritually, but socially.

Faith is not a private affair. It is lived in public witness, in justice, in mercy. It is lived in how we treat the poor, the stranger, the forgotten. We are not here to admire Jesus from a distance. We are here to follow Him—into the broken places, carrying the hope of unity.

So let me leave you with three questions to carry into the final days of Lent:

- How can I, in my daily life, be an instrument of reconciliation—bringing together those who are divided in my family, my community, or my country?
- What concrete steps can I take to serve the poor and marginalized in my own context, following the self-giving of Borgia and the burning love of de Hoyos?
- As I approach the Passion of Christ, how can I unite my own sufferings with His, trusting that through His death, He is gathering us all into one body of love and salvation?

Christ gave Himself to heal the divisions of the world. St. Francis Borgia gave up everything to serve that mission. Blessed Bernardo de Hoyos burned with a vision of Christ's Heart reigning in love.

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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.