*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and to deal with sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him.* *But if Christ is in you, then the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through His Spirit that dwells in you.*

Romans 8:1-4, 9-11

*The hand of the Lord came upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me: “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered: “O Lord God, you know.” Then He said to me: “Prophesy 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.” So, I prophesied as I had been commanded, and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then He said to me: “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. Then He said to me: “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say: ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ Therefore prophesy and say to them: Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people, and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act,” says the Lord.* Ezekiel 37:1-14

*A Sunday School teacher had just concluded her lesson and wanted to make sure she had made her point. She said, “Can anyone tell me what you must do before you can obtain forgiveness of sin?”*

*There was a short pause and then, from the back of the room, a small boy spoke up. “Sin,” he said.*

I think this was a perfectly reasonable response, don’t you?

We Need God!

1. A few weeks ago I shared with you a vision of the Babylonian exiles as presented by the prophet Jeremiah. Today, I would like to share with you the vision by another prophet, prophet Ezekiel. Both of these prophets prophesized during the tumultuous times of the Babylonian Exile. The reality of the Jewish exiles was bleak. Jerusalem was captured, the Temple desecrated, most of the people driven away from their homeland and dispersed, and some, most notably the intelligentsia and nobility, especially the young ones, taken as captives into Babylon. The people experienced resignation and felt alienated in this foreign land and culture. They could not worship God because there was no Temple, and they were unable to offer sacrifices. God’s praise was only minimal because of the people’s despair, and any form of a relationship between God and His people that still remained seemed to be slowly but surely vanishing. It appears as the reconciliation between the Jews and God was beyond any mean of repair and the feeling of devastation not only prevailed but overpowered the conquered people. Prophet Ezekiel prophesized about such reality to come, but the people did not listen then, and now they witness this prophecy to becoming a reality. God however, even in the midst of such a devastation, still offers them a message of hope. Through Ezekiel’s vision God delivers His message to the people even though it is hard for Ezekiel to preach the words of hope because he knows what the people currently experience, and they would rather sarcastically laugh than respond to his message. He also knew that in the reality and circumstances it doesn’t matter that he comes with the word offered by God because the people have no hope. He himself to some degree might also believe that it is all but a mistake for him to do what God wants him to do, since the people would never accept what he has to say, at least not now.

2. When I observe our modern world and our reality, I see a lot of similarities between what the Jews experienced then and what we see happening in the world today. The world we live and work in has also forgotten God and in result of which, as the society, we find ourselves in almost complete disarray. Some may still try to make sense of what is going on in the world today and try to keep on functioning as they should, but even the most trusting and faithful are gradually losing hope. There is a definite feeling of despair *“in the air”* for our modern society. Almost daily we are daily being bombarded with more and more bad news, we witness the massive corruption and devaluation of the existing moral and ethical values our western civilization is based upon and unfortunately, this is happening also in the Church. As I have already indicated in the past, the good is often being called *“evil”* today, and the evil is being called *“good.”* Even many people who claim to be Christians do not live according to what they preach, but try to find the ways of pleasing themselves, just as the general society at large does. Our modern reality too seem to be indeed rather bleak, and it is true not only in terms of the society but even of the Church conforming more and more to the *“society’s norms”* rather than God’s Word. When I studied in the Divinity College, one of our required readings was titled: *“Evangelizing the Neo-Pagan North America.”* Little did we know then that this particular book was but only just a *“prelude”* to the reality of the 21st century as we witness today.

3. The vision of the *“valley of dry bones”* came to the prophet directly from God, when Ezekiel too seems not to have too much hope, just as all the other exiles do. So, God moves him in the vision from the place where he wondered what to do, into the middle of the lifeless valley filled with the dry bones of the long dead ones. Confronted by all these bones, he hears God asking him: *“Son of man, can these bones live?”* It might seem as a straightforward question, but Ezekiel does not know what a profound message God’s question will reveal to him and to the people, at least not at first. There is probably nothing more convincing to demonstrate the lack of life than the bunch of dry bones. Sure, the modern scientists would argue that there is *“life”* there because of the traces of DNA in these bones, but this is not what we would truly call: a *“life.”* These bones were lying lifeless for so long that now they are nothing else but the remnants of the people that once lived, nothing more. The dry bones cannot even tell us at first glance when the life was taken away from them and only through the lab work our modern science may reveal how long they were lying there. The reality clearly indicates though that there is no life in them bones, not as Ezekiel sees them. It is so obvious that the only answer to God’s question might be a definite *“no, these bones cannot live.”* Does then the question God ask of Ezekiel is therefore just a frivolous one?

4. *“Biting his tongue,”* Ezekiel responds to God by saying: *“Only You, O God know that.”* His words might sound like the words of a politician who does not want to answer the question, but we must realize that he is a *“prophet”* and as he speaks as one and even though sometimes his words might not make too much sense to the average person, his words reveal a true message, although often a hidden one. For any rational person, God’s question does not make any sense because what they see is obvious, there is no life in these bones, but as it often happens in life, not everything we may see or hear is indeed what we see and hear. Called to be a prophet, Ezekiel responded to God a long time ago, and now he is responsible with delivering the message that comes from God, even if every fiber in his body tells him that there is no life in these dry bones, and *“the dry bones”* cannot live.But Ezekiel also knows that there is nothing impossible for God and just as God can raise a man from the dead and bring him back to life, even if these bones are currently devoid of any flesh and not even remotely resemble a body, only God knows what could happen.

5. In the end, the message that God delivers to His people through Ezekiel’s prophecy indicates and shows that what is impossible for us to do or to achieve with our human power, and what is beyond our human wisdom, it is possible for God. There is nothing impossible for the Almighty. Our modern society today might deny God’s existence and God’s influence on us. Our modern society may ignore God and confine Him to the irrelevant and irrational deity, but I like what C.S. Lewis said: *“We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him. He walks everywhere incognito.”* In the end, our society fails to take into the account the historical reality and the ever constant presence of God’s in our midst, even when we, His creation, *“turn our backs”* on Him. Here, in this vision, through Ezekiel’s prophecy He simply says: *“I will make the breath enter these bones, and these bones will come to life.”* God’s message was and still is one of hope and of the assurance also for us. As the society and as the species, we need that hope and we need that assurance, especially today in our *“divided,” “unreasonable”* and *“hurting”* world. As humanity we have this tendency to rely on our own actions and on our own decisions, but there is so much in life we still cannot achieve, no matter *“how reasonable”* we are, or precisely, because we are often *“so very much reasonable.”* Frankly, the truth is that especially now, we need God, more than we even know it.

6. As the species we might have been able to begun to explore the space, we might have been able to “*split the atom”* and discover the incredible power of the nuclear energy, we might have developed ways of protecting ourselves from many diseases, we might have created the magnificent world of art, but we still cannot cure a *“common cold,”* or find the cure for *“hate,”* neither a solution for the humanity’s ability to *“peacefully co-exist.”* The list of what we cannot do or achieve seems to be endless. Our society might have rejected God and prefers to try to implement our human solutions to every situation, but we cannot find simple solutions to many common life’s problems we encounter on daily basis. Our society might not have faith in God and do not want to have Him interfere in our affairs, and instead our society might prefer to search for the scientific, be it sociological or psychological, rational solutions, but we always fail. We can clearly see the results of *“our solutions”* in the way our society functions today, proving rather that we are very much *“dysfunctional”* more often than *“functional.”* In one of the Star Trek movies, mister Spock, commenting on the words of a marine biologist who stated that humanity has driven a particular species to extinction, said: *“To drive a species to extinction is not logical.”* To which the marine biologist responded: *“Who said the human race is logical?”* We may pretend to be logical as the species driven by reason, but if we cast aside our arrogance and impertinence, we clearly see that we are not. So, in the end, it is still that simple: *“We need God!”*

7. According to the tradition, Ezekiel was a son of a priest and was taught to become a priest, receiving the best possible education, sort of what we would call today a *“seminary, or divinity college”* education. The tradition also indicates that he was a descendant of Joshua and Rahab and was called to be a prophet at the age of 30 and as God’s prophet, he would carry the tasks ordered him by God. Although he lived in Babylon as one of the exiles there, he was still able to act according to God’s will but only because he was guided by the Spirit of the God, not by his education or his status. He also teaches us that even though we are the Church, we often look for the solutions according to what we have learned and what we can see. He indicates that if we are not led by the Spirit of the Lord, sooner or later we neglect God’s calling, and although we may try to do our best, we are often unfortunately unable to fulfill the task at hand. Ezekiel was exposed to the hopelessness his compatriots have been exposed to in Babylon, but in his vision he saw hope, a long time before this vision would come to a full fruition and this vision allowed him to see what eventually would happen. He foresaw the restoration of Israel, rebuilding of the Temple and the people being freed from the bondage of the Babylonian exile. Although he died about 20 years before king Cyrus freed the Jews and let them return to Jerusalem, he foresaw this in his vision, and he prophesized this. The prophecy of the *“valley of the dry bones”* shows us that what seems to be impossible for us, is possible for God. His prophecy indicates that God uses His people to fulfill the tasks He has for them and does it by providing them with the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

8. As a man, even a priest and a prophet Ezekiel was not able to bring the bones to life, but because he obeyed God and commanded the bones to come to life in the Lord’s name, the *“dry bones”* turned into the bodies, even though they were still lacking any signs of life. This too has changed however, when on God’s command the *“breath of life*” entered these lifeless bodies, and they became alive. What we see in this vision are two equally important forces working and acting together: *“the Spirit of God”* and *“the Word of God.”* Only when Ezekiel correspondingly applied these two together, he was able to accomplish his task. Through his vision, we must see that there was nothing Ezekiel could do on his own, and only with the guidance of the Spirit of God and with the power of God’s Word, he was able to restore life to the lifelessness. The same principle applies to our ministry today and what we too need to hear today is that we must embrace both of these powerful forces and allow the Holy Spirit to control us. When we open ourselves to the power of God’s Word, and His Spirit, we too will be able to be successful, and just as these *“dry bones”* came to life, through our ministry, the world still may come back to true life. Remember, I might be your pastor, but we all are God’s *“ministers.”* This is what I see in the “Valley of Dry Bones” of prophet Ezekiel. No matter what: *“We need God!”*