

Sunday 22nd March 2026

The Fifth Sunday of Lent

Gospel Reading

John 11.1-45

The Death of Lazarus

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

Jesus the Resurrection and the Life

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

Jesus Weeps

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to

him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

Jesus Raises Lazarus to Life

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

Other Readings: Ezekiel 37.1-14 Psalm 130 Romans 8.6-11

Homily

In the Gospel of John, we read that Jesus describes himself as the water of Life, (4.14) the bread of Life, (6.35) and the light of Life. (8.12) But in the gospel today, Jesus reveals himself as the resurrection and the life. The raising of Lazarus from the dead is the last of Jesus' miraculous signs that John records, and it is the most powerful revelation of who Jesus was. It was that sign, along with the words that he spoke that ultimately led to his crucifixion. By raising Lazarus back to life Jesus demonstrates that he has authority over death. But Jesus also says that he can bring all to eternal life by raising them from spiritual death.

This is a direct criticism against the leaders of the Jewish faith, and is the one that led to his death. They could no longer deal with this man, especially in the face of such a wondrous sign. They refused to open their eyes to the truth of the words he spoke.

Our physical death separates us from those we love. That will happen because our bodies will eventually wear out, maybe through illness or simply great age and that is a fact of life, but it is our spiritual death that separates us from God, and all that God has to offer us that is what Jesus came to address.

Jesus' words about walking in the light (11.9-10) are a cryptic response to his disciple's fears about a return to Judea and the recurring danger to his life. But Jesus points out that while he does the work of his Father, he will be safe, and so it will be for all who walk in the light of the Lord, for they will be free from sin and freed from the darkness of death. All who follow Christ will be free because they will receive the fullness of God's grace and be released from the spiritual death that they are struggling with. They will be welcomed back into a full relationship with God and will receive eternal life. This is what Jesus came to share with us, the hope and joy of being at one with the Father through him.

Jesus said to Martha, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die...' But Jesus finishes that sentence to the sister of his beloved friend Lazarus, with the question, 'do you believe?'

We begin every Christian funeral service with these wonderful comforting words. They offer hope to the bereaved that one day they will be reunited with those they love who have died, that they will be together again in God's kingdom for all eternity.

Jesus knew that people needed proof, many would always need proof. But first he wept, even knowing what he was about to do, still he was not immune to the grief that he felt at his friend's death, and the pain of those around him who loved Lazarus as he did. So, to help those who followed him finally and fully believe that what he said was true, that he was the Messiah, Jesus had to let Lazarus die so that by raising him back to life the full beauty and power of God could be seen working through him to His praise and glory - so that all may believe.

Conversation Questions

1. Do you believe, and if you are unsure what will it take to help you?
2. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you?
What is it?
3. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

Most merciful God,
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ
delivered and saved the world:
grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross
we may triumph in the power of his victory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

(or)

Gracious Father,
you gave up your Son
out of love for the world:
lead us to ponder the mysteries of his passion,
that we may know eternal peace
through the shedding of our Saviour's blood,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

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