

5th Sunday of Lent - A
Ezekiel 37:12-14;
Romans 8:8-11;
John 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45
Little Flower - 3/26/23

My Brothers and Sisters,

In today's Gospel we hear the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. As I mentioned last week, all of the miracles of Jesus were signs of the coming of God's kingdom and signs of Jesus' divinity. However, the miracle in last week's Gospel, the cure of the man born blind, and the miracle in this week's Gospel, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, are the strongest proofs of his divinity.

During his public ministry, Jesus raised two other people to life, the daughter of Jairus and the son of the widow of Nain. The significant difference was that the daughter of Jairus had just died and the widow's son was not yet buried. In today's Gospel, when Jesus asked them to remove the stone, Martha told Jesus, "*Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days.*" In other words, the other two might not have been fully dead, but Lazarus certainly was because he had been dead four days.

I recently read an explanation for this that I had never heard before. It suggests that at least part of the Jewish tradition believes that "For the first three days after death the soul floats above the body, thinking that it will return to the body."

Also, the Gospels for the third through fifth Sundays of Lent in the first cycle of readings are Gospels linked to RCIA and Easter. In the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, the theme was water. Water is life-giving both naturally and supernaturally. By rising from the dead, Jesus became a life-giving spirit. Last Sunday, in the story of the man born blind, the theme was light. The Easter candle represents Christ, the one true light of the world. In today's Gospel, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. The theme is life. On Easter we will celebrate Jesus' passage from death to life. If we have embraced Lent, we will also celebrate our own resurrection to new life with him.

If the miracle in today's Gospel proves Jesus' divinity, it also gives us an insight into his humanity and makes Jesus more real, more relatable. Notice what Martha and Mary said when they let Jesus know he was ill: "*Master, the one you love is ill.*" After Martha came out to meet him, "*he became perturbed and deeply troubled, and said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Sir, come and see.' And Jesus wept. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him.'*" This Gospel strongly suggests that Jesus' friendship with Lazarus and his sisters was a very human friendship. This story reveals the depths of Jesus' human emotions, the depth of his human love. If we believe this, I think we can enter a deeper, more human friendship with Jesus.

My brothers and sisters, in the pre-Vatican II Liturgy, part of today's Gospel was the Gospel at every funeral Mass. Martha said to Jesus, "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*" Jesus said to her, "*Your brother will rise.*" Martha said to him, "*I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day.*" Jesus then spoke to her some of his most powerful words in the Gospel, "*I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?*" She said to him, "*Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.*"

Jesus' words to Martha are his words to us today and every day: "*I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?*" Perhaps better, "Can you believe this?" Hopefully, we will be able to answer with Martha, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."