

## **FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT - THE RAISING OF LAZARUS**

Dear Friends, today we have the poignant Gospel of the "Raising of Lazarus." Many of us have stood at the grave of a loved one weeping. I still vividly remember my own Dad's passing and burial last summer. No matter how great our faith may be, saying "Good-bye" is never easy.

As I prepare this "homily" I realize that it will not be given publicly in church, as we find ourselves in the midst of the coronavirus outbreak. There is immense sorrow that comes from the sickness and death wrought by this disease.

I can't help but think of those families unable to hold traditional funeral services for their loved ones who have died, not only from Covid-19, but from hundreds of other causes.

There is also our personal experiences of isolation, as well as disappointment because of the postponement or cancellation of important events (such as graduations and weddings).

Our inability to gather for the Eucharist is another cause for sadness. As I celebrate Mass privately I feel the loss of your physical presence deeply. I am consoled, however, by our faith in our connectedness as members of the Body of Christ.

In today's Gospel we read that when Jesus witnesses the great sorrow and the weeping of his friends, Martha and Mary, and when he arrives at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, he is "perturbed." That's not a very good translation of the Greek; a better version would be "he was deeply moved in spirit and disturbed."

And then we have those three powerful words: And Jesus wept."

Jesus weeps, even though he knows that he is going to raise Lazarus from the dead. Jesus shared completely in our human nature. I think we can also say that he experienced a kind of

"Divine Sorrow" over the reality of the fallen human condition and the consequence of death.

However, Jesus is the answer to this reality as he declares to Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life; they who believe in me, even if they die, yet shall they live."

Jesus then poses to Martha the question that every Christian must answer in the depths of his or her own heart: "Do you believe this?"

As did Martha, so you and I are called to renew our profession of faith in Jesus: "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God!"

The raising of Lazarus is a "sign" that reveals Jesus as the Son of God, who has the power to raise the dead. It also foreshadows Jesus' own Resurrection, as well as the resurrection of all who believe in him.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us hold on to the hope that our faith in the Resurrection gives us. It is that hope which casts out fear and gives us the courage to love generously, even sacrificially, as Jesus did.

As I have written before, we have been given a very different kind of Lent this year as we are challenged to carry the various crosses the Covid-19 pandemic presents to us. As we have seen in the news and on social media, people are performing outstanding service to others, from medical personnel to the cashiers at our grocery stores. And there are the simple acts of kindness such as calling the elderly or giving a larger tip to the restaurant workers who deliver food.

Jesus is always calling us to come out of the tomb of self-centeredness. And I sincerely believe that he will lead us out of this time of sorrow and sadness into the light of Easter joy.