



WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



5th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

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"I am the resurrection and the life." John 11:25

John's Gospel account for this fifth Sunday of Lent tells of the raising of Lazarus and shows the fullness Jesus in his humanity and in his divinity. He shows deep compassion for Mary and Martha on the loss of their brother. And this grief touches his own heart and he weeps openly. This account appears in John's gospel shortly before Jesus is captured, tried and crucified. It is the event that most directly results in his condemnation by those seeking to kill him. In the other gospels it is quite another event that turns the officials against Jesus: the cleansing of the temple. The effect of John's arrangement is striking, since immediately before his death and resurrection Jesus proclaims those words that form the very heart of today's story: *"I am the resurrection and the life."* All the elements of the story point toward these words and put them in bold relief.

We learn first that Lazarus is a special friend, so we might think that Jesus would have hastened to his side in his sickness. But his delay gives Jesus the opportunity stress the fact that time and the severity of illness illuminate that Jesus, in His divinity, rises above time and mere mortality. Jesus the Christ is master of life and death.

When the disciples protest Jesus' decision to go back to Judea where his arrest by the authorities awaits him, we are given a chance to see that this, too, is irrelevant. What does the master of life and death have, ultimately, to fear from such dangers?

The poetic, prayerful response of Jesus to the apostles' protest foreshadows the outcome of the situation. We are compelled to open our spiritual eyes and see what Jesus has been trying to teach us. We are the fortunate ones that have been enlightened by belief in Jesus the Christ; we have nothing to fear. From the center of our being we cry out, *"Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief."* Mark 9:24 Then, as we believe more strongly, the light increases within us.

Thomas, called Didymus response at this turning point in his faith, shows conviction with his decision to accept the consequences of being a disciple.

The discussion about the difference between sleep and death is John's way of reiterating that Jesus is actually going to raise the dead, not merely revive the seriously ill. And the fact that Lazarus has been dead for four days impresses the witnesses of the miracle even more. Custom and law required burial within 24 hours because there were no means of preserving a corpse. The central point is further stressed: Nothing can hinder the master of life and death.

It is also John's intent in this story to prefigure the imminent suffering of Jesus himself. The personal grief and emotional stress that Jesus expresses at the loss of his friend is a prediction of his own passion and death. But that suffering and death, too, will be overcome when Jesus is raised from the dead.

Finally, the last sentence of this Gospel points to all the signs and their intended effect: *"Now many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he had done began to believe in him."*

This next week, let the historical facts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection settle in. Let these facts build a foundation that supports the miraculous reality of Christ's mastery over sin, and the ultimate consequence of sin, *"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* 1 Cor 15:55-57 For like Jesus, we are created to rise again in glory!

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John

The sisters of Lazarus sent word to Jesus, saying,
"Master, the one you love is ill."

When Jesus heard this he said,

*"This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God,
that the Son of God may be glorified through it."*

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

So when he heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to his disciples,

"Let us go back to Judea."

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home.

Martha said to Jesus,

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

But even now I know that whatever you ask of God,
God will give you."

Jesus said to her,

"Your brother will rise."

Martha said,

"I know he will rise,

in the resurrection on the last day."

Jesus told her,

*"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."

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."

But some of them said,

"Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man
have done something so that this man would not have died?"

So Jesus, perturbed again, came to the tomb.

Thomas, called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go to die with him."

It was a cave, and a stone lay across it.

Jesus said, "*Take away the stone.*"

Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him,

"Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days."

Jesus said to her,

*"Did I not tell you that if you believe
you will see the glory of God?"*

So they took away the stone.

And Jesus raised his eyes and said,

*"Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me;
but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me."*

And when he had said this, He cried out in a loud voice, "*Lazarus, come out!*"

The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth.

So Jesus said to them,

"Untie him and let him go."

Now many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he had done began to believe in him.