

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent – A – March 9, 2008

### LESSON: Providence Can Take Care of Tragedies

Things are really different today...

- ✍ The statues and crosses are all covered with purple
- ✍ There are candles all over the place around our Lenten display
- ✍ The altar cloth has written on it the “7 Last Words of Christ”

We’ve entered “Passiontide” – and today, as this “mini-season” begins, we are faced with the reality of life and death in this Gospel story of Lazarus. St John points out that "Jesus **loved** Martha and her sister and Lazarus."



- ✍ And yet, **in spite of** his love, Jesus doesn't **rush back** to Jerusalem to heal Lazarus.
- ✍ Nor does he heal him from a **distance**, as he did with the Centurion's servant.
- ✍ Jesus **loves these friends**, and yet he **lets them suffer**.
- ✍ He lets them experience their **helplessness** and **weakness**, the painful separation of **death** and the **loss** of a loved one.

Did he do it to **punish** them? Did he do it because he had no **power** to remedy the evil? No, he let them suffer precisely **because** he loved them.

✍ If God **protected** us from all suffering, we would make the mistake of thinking that earth **is heaven**, that we could make ourselves truly happy just by **our own efforts**.

- ✍ God allows us to **experience** suffering as a way to **remind** us that life on earth is a **journey** towards heaven - it's the **path**, not the **goal**.
- ✍ The goal is **heaven**, and the resurrection of Lazarus is an **appetizer** of heaven.
- ✍ Jesus **uses** our sufferings to help us to **do that** more and more.
- ✍ Our sufferings remind us that we are not God; they make us **turn to God**.
- ✍ He uses them as **opportunities** to act in our lives in **new ways**, revealing himself to us more **completely**, just as he did with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.

In this way, he shows that **his Providence** is **more powerful** than even **life's greatest tragedies**. Nothing is out of reach for Christ's redemption.

### ILLUSTRATION: Christ brings good from evil

Jesus raises Lazarus **from the dead**.

- ☞ Lazarus had been in the tomb for **four days**, and Jesus Christ **calls** his name, **orders** him to come out, and he **does**.
- ☞ Death itself **obeys** Christ the Lord.
- ☞ Lazarus, as soon as the cloths were removed, surely **gazed** into his Lord's shining eyes with the **deepest love** and most determined, **courageous loyalty** that he had ever experienced.



It is **no coincidence** that the Church presents this scene to us towards the end of the **Lenten liturgical crescendo**:

- ☞ two weeks ago Christ told the **woman at the well** that he was the Messiah;
- ☞ last week he **cured a man born blind**, something no one had ever done before;
- ☞ and now he **tops everything** by raising Lazarus from the dead.

Lazarus' death resulted in his burial in the earth, or in the darkness of a cave (as was the custom then). But in raising him from the dead, Jesus brings him back out into the light – a glorious light – a new life.

## **APPLICATION: Awaiting 2 different resurrections**

Really, there are 2 different types of resurrection:

- ☞ The future resurrection – at the end of time.
- ☞ Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life.”
- ☞ When the end of time comes, our soul and body will be re-united to live in eternity with God.
- ☞ We will have come out of the dark tomb to live in the brightness of Christ's light.

But then there is also another resurrection, one we experience here and now



- ☞ When we come out of the darkness of our sin to live once more in Christ's light and truth.
- ☞ It is our own sinfulness which places us in the darkness of the tomb,
- ☞ But confession restores us to life again – to sacramental life – to walk once more with Christ.
- ☞ We truly “come back to life” when we come to God in Confession

I always remember my favorite image of this gospel. Usually we think of it as it is presented even here in our stained glass window. But the perspective the image I always think of gives a different perspective. Instead of being outside, waiting for Lazarus to come out, we are *inside with Lazarus* waiting for the Lord to call **us** out – waiting for Christ to call us out of our own, self-made darkness of sin into His glorious light.

That's what the candles today are all about. That's what the drapes, perhaps, remind us: that we cover ourselves in darkness by our sin, but God wants to raise us up again.

We are given the opportunity today, as we celebrate our Lent Penance Service, to recognize the darkness in which we've placed ourselves by our sins, and to come out into the light. The candles all around our display remind us of the light of Christ calling us out of the darkness of our sin, so that at the resurrection, we WILL live ETERNALLY in Christ's light.



This evening [tomorrow evening], will you come to celebrate God's mercy and forgiveness in confession so that you can leave behind the darkness, and come into the warmth and love of Christ's light?

