

***There's a Little Bit of Lazarus in Each of Us***  
***[Hay un Poco de Lázaro en Cada Uno de Nosotros]***

*Que las palabras de mi boca y la meditación de nuestro corazón sean aceptables ante tus ojos, oh Señor, mi roca y mi salvación. Amén. [Salmos 19:14]*

On this fifth Sunday in Lent, our Gospel lesson continues our exploration of John. In today's lesson Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

Lazarus, and his sisters Mary and Martha, are friends with and devoted followers of Jesus. Today's Gospel begins with Jesus receiving word from Mary and Martha that their brother Lazarus is ill. They wanted Jesus to come quickly to heal their brother, as they feared Lazarus' illness might lead to his death. However, when Jesus heard the news, he said, "[t]his illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." So, Jesus remained where he was for two more days before going to Lazarus.

When Jesus does reach Bethany, Lazarus has already been dead for four days and has been laid in a tomb. Jesus already knew that Lazarus had died. However, the death and rising of Lazarus served other purposes. Lazarus' death and rising is a foreshadowing of Jesus' own death and resurrection; which is to come. In raising Lazarus from the dead, many of the Jews who had witnessed this event came to believe in Jesus. Although not included in today's Gospel lesson, John Gospel records that, as a result of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus' following among the Jews was growing, and the chief priests and Pharisees were worried about how their Roman occupiers would react, so they immediately began plotting to put Jesus and Lazarus to death.

While Jesus was en route to where Lazarus had been laid, Martha went to meet him. When she found Jesus, her words were a mixture of frustration, disappointment, faith, and hope. On seeing Jesus she said: "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." Martha, in a profession of faith, also said to Jesus "I know that he will rise again in resurrection on the last day."

Jesus told 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." And again, in another profession of faith, Martha proclaimed that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world. The significance of this point, as one commentator put it, is that "Jesus pulls the hope of the future resurrection into the present, promising abundant, eternal life that begins here and now." This message is reinforced in our first reading from Ezekiel about breathing life into the dry bones; in the words of the psalmist, reminding us that "[w]ith him there is plenteous redemption, and

he shall redeem Israel from all their sins;” and in St. Pau’s letter to the Romans, reminding them that [i]f the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.”

Later, when Mary met Jesus, in response to his summons while he was en route to where Lazarus had been laid, Jesus, in seeing Mary in such distress, was, as John put it, “greatly disturbed in spirit” and moved to tears.

When Jesus arrived at the tomb where Lazarus had been laid, he said, “Take away the stone.” After praying to God, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” And, Lazarus came out; his face, hands, and feet still wrapped in strips of cloth. Jesus said, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

In preparing today’s sermon, I read an interesting commentary on this Gospel lesson by the Rev. Rick Morley, an Episcopal priest and the Rector of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Basking Ridge, New Jersey. Fr. Morley reflected on Martha’s protest when Jesus asked that the stone be rolled away from Lazarus’ tomb. Fr. Morley, referencing the King James Version of the Bible, notes that Martha responds: “Lord, by this time he stinketh.” Lazarus had been in his tomb for four days, and Martha thought that by now his body would have started to decompose and would have begun to stink.

Fr. Morley suggests that there is a little bit of Lazarus in each of us. In some respects, “we are all dead and lifeless, wrapped up corpses, [and] bound in the grave clothes which the world lays on us.” As Fr. Morley suggests, we are all a little stiff and have begun to smell a little bit.

I believe Fr. Morley is correct. Sometimes we live far back in the past or way ahead in the future; away from the present and the here and now. In doing so, we allow the worries, concerns, and burdens of this world to encase us in our own little tomb: We may worry about our finances, we may be concerned about our families and friends; and we may be burdened with what is going on in our communities, our government, and in our world around us. At those times, we allow ourselves to get so caught up with our worries, concerns, and burdens that we forget what St. Matthew said about not worrying.

*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will*

*we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today. [Matthew 6:25-34]*

As Fr. Morley put it, “[we stink], until Jesus calls us out of the tomb. Until he orders everything that binds us and holds us down, to be stripped off and tossed aside. Until he breathes his holy breath into us again and makes us a new creation.”

And, to quote Fr. Morley, “I am glad that Jesus calls us out, because I still need it. I still [stink; some days more than others.] I still find myself [locked in my own tomb] from time to time; bound up and wound up by the expectations of others, by my own insecurities, [and] by my sin.”

*God of new life, as Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, renew and restore us to new life, leaving in the grave all that prevents us from loving you fully.*

En el nombre del Padre, del Hijo, y del Espíritu Santo, Amén.