



## **Fifth Sunday of Lent** **Come to the Tomb....Receive Hope**

Remarks & Relevance - Sr. Ann

Welcome to anyone who is able to connect via technology! As we prepare for the Fifth Sunday of Lent, I hope you are not getting tired of this Journey? We've traveled from the desert - to the mountain - to the well - to the pool of Siloam and now to the tomb of Lazarus. In the midst of this traveling, we have also ceased to travel, in many ways due to the restrictions imposed on us due to the coronavirus.

This week we are going to meet up with Martha and Mary again. This time it's not about bustling around preparing dinner and listening to Jesus. This Gospel is about death, grief, resurrection, the promise of eternal life, and the expression of belief in the Son of God. Let us listen, reflect and hopefully share with someone the depth of faith this message has to offer us.

### **Read Gospel (scroll to end) - Reflect & Share (meaningful words/phrases & why)**

Throughout the Gospels we hear about the mission of Jesus. He came to live among us and to teach us many things that as disciples we are challenged to imitate in our lives. This passage from the Gospel of John offers us much to think about and apply to our life of faith.

This time Jesus isn't ministering to strangers, but to close friends. We heard in Luke's Gospel about busy Martha and listening Mary. In this passage we hear that they have a brother named Lazarus, who is ill. Just as we would do in case someone we love is sick, they send a message to their friend, Jesus.

After two days, Jesus informs his disciples that they need to go back to Judea. Not a good idea they say. The Jews are really on your case and will be out to get you. Jesus replies that the light that shines within a person must be the guiding force for making decisions.

He tells them that his friend Lazarus is asleep and he's going to awaken him.

Of course, the disciples are thinking about ordinary sleep, but Jesus has other things in mind. He knows that Lazarus has died and he must go in order that they can “believe”. As disciples in process, Thomas speaks for them and tells them that they need to go with Jesus to figure out what this death and belief is all about.

By the time Jesus arrives in Bethany, Lazarus has already been dead and laid in the tomb for four days. Naturally many of their Jewish friends have come to be of comfort to Martha and Mary. True to form, Martha, the busy one, rushes out to meet Jesus. Mary sits at home, probably being comforted by their friends.

Martha, who, in her bustling about conveys that she gets the message of who Jesus is and professes her belief in him. “Lord...if you had been here, he wouldn’t have died”....BUT, I know that “whatever you ask of God will be granted to you.”

Jesus tells her that Lazarus will rise.....Martha expresses what she has come to believe. Yes, I know....that will happen in the resurrection on the last day. Jesus now seeks to deepen her understanding of who He is by stating: “I am the resurrection and the life...believe in me and you will never die”.

Aren’t these words we all cling to when we are faced with the death of a loved one? It’s painful and difficult as we deal with something we or medical professionals can no longer offer. Death takes us into the spiritual realm, where hope in eternal life sustains us. Having this belief somehow enables us to have hope as we cope with the reality of life and death.

Martha sends word to Mary to come, that Jesus wants to see her. Off she goes and of course her Jewish friends follow her, thinking she is heading for the tomb to continue her mourning. Mary comes to Jesus and falls at his feet, expressing her belief in him, knowing that in his illness Jesus would have cured Lazarus.

Now we witness Jesus entering into the emotional reality we all face when a loved one dies. He sees her weeping and sympathizes. “Where have you laid him”? “Come and see”. And Jesus wept. Sounds familiar, doesn’t it?

Like you, I am thinking of friends and loved ones who gather at the home of someone who has died, or at a funeral home. The tears, the embraces, the struggling words of comfort. The reality of death!

Sometimes there are no words that can be spoken. The realization is too painful, even though an illness has taken its toll. Even worse, when death is sudden, the struggle is really difficult. Perhaps, the tears that Jesus wept can be sustaining since they were an expression of sorrow and love. We've all been there - the memories and reality are engraved in our hearts and our lives. The words "Jesus wept" can be a source of consolation for us as they were for Martha and Mary. Yet more is to come for them .... and us. The Jews see how much Jesus loved Lazarus and begin to question why He, who opened the blind man's eyes, and performed other healing miracles, could not have done something to prevent the death of Lazarus.

Again personal questions resonate in our hearts. Doctors have done so much to sustain life....why weren't the medical professionals able to do something? Why did this child have to die? This person was too young? How can we go on without him/her? This happened so suddenly! Why couldn't so and so be here?

Very valid questions and statements - we have all heard them - or made them. At times like this, we need to allow the weeping Jesus to walk with us....to go to the tomb / the cemetery with us and offer us hope. Not in the way, it happened for Lazarus, but in the faith we profess and believe in...the faith that sustains us.

Jesus proceeds to the tomb of Lazarus. He tells those gathered to remove the stone that leads into the space where Lazarus has been laid. Practical Martha blurts out there will be a stench, an odor of decomposition since he has been dead for four days. In those days, they did not have the embalment process we have today. Jesus reminds her that the glory of God is about to be revealed. She has no idea what that means - so the stone is removed.

Jesus now enters into an intimate dialogue with his Father:

- Thank you for hearing me.
  - I know you always hear me.
  - Because of the crowd here I have said this....that they will see your glory.
- Statements of BELIEF! Knowing God hears us when we pray, giving Him thanks. When we speak in the midst of others....let it be for your greater honor and glory.

Then he says: "Lazarus, come out". Slowly, but surely, out Lazarus comes, walking with difficulty due to the burial cloths they used at that time.

Jesus tells them to untie him and let him go. No more details - no more remarks from Mary and Martha - no words from Lazarus. No more statements from Jesus. We just hear that many Jews who were gathered there and witnessed what had happened began to believe in him.

The rest of the story is left to our imagination - our belief - our hope in the Resurrection we will all share in as our souls enter eternal life and in the final Resurrection on the last day.

So...what does this Gospel teach us about our life today? What practical applications can we apply to our lives? We know about the importance of having friends, who sustain us when things get difficult. We all have friends that we can call on in time of need. But....they can't call us back to life once we have died like Lazarus. Jesus brought Lazarus back to life to reveal the glory of God. This happened for Mary, Martha and their friends to witness, but for us to believe in eternal life, where our souls will experience the glory of God forever. Lazarus died again at some point, and experienced this eternal life forever.

May the "light" Jesus spoke about be that source of hope that continues to guide us on the journey of life! May his words "I am the Resurrection and the Life" give us hope when we or our loved ones are facing the death of our earthly life.

This gospel leads us into the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus, which will occur beginning next Sunday. Through his suffering and death, we receive the promise and gift of eternal life with Him.

Perhaps this is a good time to look at areas of our life that are dead and no longer life-giving for others. How can we bring "new life" into our midst?

- Are our words, actions, and behavior reflective of what is buried in the tomb of self-interest, self-pity, self-glory, etc.?
- Are we really giving glory to God by all that we do, by living the way He would want us to?
- Are we giving God the priority in our life and our family that we should?
- Are we teaching our children trust, hope and belief when times get difficult and there are no easy answers or solutions?

With God's help all things are possible. With Jesus' example all that is dead in us can be called forth to new life. We experience this through the practice and priority of our faith - through our choices and decisions. We are nurtured by this through the Sacraments, the Mass, the Eucharist, Reconciliation, the Gifts of the Spirit and the Words of Scripture. We are sustained in our efforts to rise from death to new life by sharing our life of faith with each other.

This can happen with friends, family and parish community. It can happen due to the effort you put forth to deepen your spiritual life during the Lenten season.

Let us leave this tomb, grateful for the continued temporary life of Lazarus, but mindful of Jesus as He leaves and prepares to face the journey of his passion, death and resurrection. He endured ridicule, rejection, denial, betrayal, abandonment and unbelievable suffering. Let us continue on this journey with Him as faithful disciples. Let us continue to come to the tomb.....as well as the cross and receive the hope that is offered to us.

During these final Lenten days, we are also confronted with so many limitations that have been imposed on us because of the fears associated with the coronavirus. We are not in control of our lives and choices in ways we have been accustomed to. We are dealing with something that is life-changing in so many ways. Let us face this uncertainty with hope, surrounded and supported by faith, family and friends. Let us be strengthened by the comforting love of Jesus as Martha and Mary were. Let us be renewed as we enter into a new phase of life as Lazarus did. Let us remove the cloths that bind us so that we may go forth from our tombs of confinement and experience whatever new life and hope Jesus offers us, especially during these coming weeks.



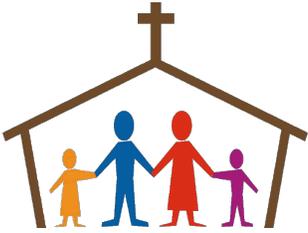
**Fifth Sunday of Lent**  
**Come to the Tomb....Receive Hope**



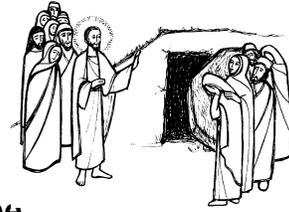
**Small Group Faith Sharing Questions**

**Based on Gospel for Fifth Sunday of Lent - March 29<sup>th</sup> (John 11: 1-45)**

1. What sustained you in the death of a loved one?  
What signs of faith gave you comfort and hope?
  
2. What can you learn from Martha and Mary in this Gospel?
  
3. When have you experienced times when you or family members questioned the “if’s” and “why’s” of suffering and death?  
Who or what helped you believe that God’s Will would happen?
  
4. Like the Jews who came to believe because of what they had witnessed, when have you seen someone moved to deeper faith because of what they experienced through the death of a loved one?
  
5. What signs of hope does this Gospel offer you about your belief in the promise of eternal life which Jesus gained for us through his Passion, Death and Resurrection?
  
6. What message does this Gospel present to you in light of our current situation in relation to what we are experiencing from the coronavirus?



## Take Home Sheet Fifth Week of Lent



### Come to the Tomb....Receive Hope March 29th

#### **FAMILY TIME - SOME SUGGESTIONS**

Note: Ages of children needs to be considered

Prepare a prayer space in your home. Bible (open to John 11: 1-45) - cross or crucifix - bandages or cloth - memorial cards - flowers or something else relevant for your family

Purpose: to remind us of death

Depending on ages and schedules, at least once during the week (family or personal decision) gather as a family and announce.... **We are going to the Tomb and learn about Hope**

This is a lengthy and difficult Gospel (depending on ages of children) to understand. Parents, be creative and wise! Children can surprise you, given the opportunity. The story of the Raising of Lazarus teaches us, not only about death and resurrection, but about many other things:

- friendship - need for support and presence - willingness to change plans - expression of belief - Jesus' teaching about resurrection and life - human aspects of mourning and weeping - the miracle of being raised from the dead and the glory of God revealed.

Provide some examples and experiences.

Read this Gospel passage (John 11: 1-45). Explain if necessary.

Take a couple of minutes to be quiet and think about these questions:

- What do you remember happening in our family when.....died?
- What signs of "faith" were you aware of? How did that help?
- How was the support of family and friends evident?
- What did Jesus mean when he said: "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."
- Are you afraid to die? Why? Why not? What do you think heaven will be like?

Conclude with prayer: **"Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord"**.

Individual members take turns saying it and other family members repeat.

Add names of deceased family members and friends.

#### **Additional Suggestion:**

Encourage family members to visit a cemetery, if possible. Find family burial sites and try to imagine their life with God. What would they say to you about that? Also walk around and check dates of birth and death and how long that person lived on this earth.

**Fifth Sunday of Lent (March 29<sup>th</sup>)****The Raising of Lazarus****John 11: 1-45**

Now a man was ill, Lazarus from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who had anointed the Lord with perfumed oil and dried his feet with her hair; it was her brother Lazarus who was ill.

So the sisters sent word to him 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." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just trying to stone you, and you want to go back there?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in a day? If one walks during the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks at night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

He said this, and then told them, "Our friend Lazarus is asleep, but I am going to awaken him." So the disciples said to him, "Master, if he is asleep, he will be saved." But Jesus was talking about his death, while they thought that he meant ordinary sleep. So then Jesus said to them clearly, "Lazarus has died. And I am glad for you that I was not there, that you may believe. Let us go to him." So Thomas, called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go to die with him."

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, only about two miles away. And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. 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 to him, "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."

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary secretly, saying, "The teacher is here and is asking for you." As soon as she heard this, she rose quickly and went to him. For Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still where Martha had met him. So when the Jews who were with her in the house comforting her saw Mary get up quickly and go out, they followed her, presuming that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

(over)

When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her weeping, 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. 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.