

5th Sunday A
Lent—2020
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The desert, a high mountain, a deep well, a pool and today a tomb—five images of the Sunday Lenten Gospel texts this year.

Before we reflect on Jesus, arriving at the tomb and raising His friend Lazarus from the dead, I wish to reflect briefly at the outset on one dimension of Jesus' life and our lives—the gift of friendship.

Jesus had to have met many people on His journey in His three years of public ministry. It is no different for you or me in our respective journeys in life. Some relationships, encounters, are passing. Others are more profound and lasting-- one's spouse, our children, brothers and sisters, relatives, that best friend who has been cultivated over many years if we are so fortunate. These are individuals we are willing to die for, to sacrifice everything that they might experience our sustaining love. What a great gift--the gift of perduring and lasting friendship!

In today's Gospel on this fifth Sunday of Lent 2020, we recognize friendships in the life of Jesus --his special friendship with Lazarus and with Martha and Mary. In no other text in the entire gospel do we see so clearly the human side of Jesus. Listen again to John's Gospel! When He saw Mary weeping, Jesus "became perturbed and deeply troubled." Jesus even began to weep when He heard that Lazarus was dead. So close was He to Martha, Mary and Lazarus. They were His friends. He loved them. He loved Lazarus. "See how much he loved him."

Do we have similar experiences with those privileged friends in our lives? I know we do. I certainly hope we do. Especially, in challenging times such as this, we gravitate to our friends for support and encouragement as hopefully they do to us.

As we look to Jesus, precisely in the midst of this unveiling of His very humanity, we also begin to understand a most marvelous truth about His divinity. Not only does He raise Lazarus from the dead with three simple words: "Lazarus, come out!" but He also says of Himself: "I am the resurrection and the life." He personalizes the resurrection and links faith in Him to the promise of life eternal for each one of us. "Whoever believes in me, though he should die, will come to life; and whoever is alive and believes in me will never die."

St. Paul explains this truth even further in today's second reading by underscoring the role of the Holy Spirit: "If the Spirit of one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,[and He does] the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit dwelling in you." It is always good for us to contemplate anew the presence of the Holy Spirit within each of us--the life-giving Spirit.

Each one of us, baptized and confirmed in Christ Jesus, His followers, has received the gift of the Holy Spirit. In fact, we are temples of the Holy Spirit. This is prophesized by Ezekiel in the first reading: "I will put my spirit in you that you may live."

Resurrection is not then simply a theological issue, or an event we celebrate each year around this time of the year. It is a unique encounter with Jesus. It is a religious experience born of faith in the Risen Jesus. It is not an extravagant miracle happening out there. It means the transforming and living presence of the Risen Jesus, in the power of His Holy Spirit, acting and living within each one of us.

Jesus is the Resurrection. Already in this life, Jesus is alive right now in our midst, and within us, and He is ready to change our lives at this very moment in the power of His Holy Spirit, to liberate us from whatever binds us.

With two weeks to go before Easter, the Church wets our appetite this fifth Sunday of Lent to prepare us, to help us ponder the great mystery that we are about to celebrate. Even in Lent, however, Jesus is risen. I will mention again that Jesus is not simply an historical figure. He is alive in the bread broken for us and the wine poured out for us. He is, moreover, the healing Jesus experienced in the Anointing of the Sick and the Sacrament of Penance. He is alive.

Martha and Mary were right to call for Jesus as Lazarus was ill. They are wonderful examples for each of us in our day.

Many of our friends, friends we love—our children, our grandchildren-- individuals we are privileged to call friends, are ill or in need of spiritual help today even as we speak and especially in this time. They await a meeting with Jesus as Lazarus awaited Jesus. Like Martha and Mary, each of us should call upon Jesus (in the person of the priest), if someone is sick or near death and in need of the Sacrament of the Sick. Similarly, what a great work of charity to invite someone to experience the healing Sacrament of Reconciliation. Jesus never tires of forgiving our sins, of

healing us no matter the ailment or how long it has been. And oh how joyful we become, before the tombs of our lives and the lives of others, to hear those revealed and inspired words: “Untie him and let him go.”

Or in the Words of Pope Francis, repeating the words of Jesus to Lazarus, and even the dead hear His words: “ ‘Come forth!’ It is a beautiful invitation (he says) to true freedom, to allow us to grab onto these words of Jesus that He repeats to each one of us today, an invitation that allows us to free ourselves... Our resurrection begins here: when we decide to obey the commands of Jesus to come into the light, to life; when the masks fall from our faces — so many times we are masked by sin: the masks must fall! — and we rediscover the courage of our original faces, created in the image and likeness of God.”

And so the living Jesus, who is the Resurrection and the Life, continues to call us to faith in Him, to the new life that He promised. He gives us Lazarus, His “friend” for whom He wept, and whom He raised from the tomb, as a sign and pledge even now of the new and eternal life to come. And with renewed confidence, we say together: “With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.”

AMEN