

The Fifth Sunday of Lent/Year A 2017 –
1/2 April 2017 – HOMILY –
Our Lady of Victory Parish Community

1st Reading:

Ezekiel 37:12-14

- “O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them, . . . Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and have you rise from them, . . . I will put my spirit in you that you may live, . . . thus you shall know that I am the Lord. I have promised, and I will do it,”

Responsorial Psalm:

Psalm 130 - *Sung*

2nd Reading:

Romans 8:8-11

- “If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit dwelling in you.”

GOSPEL:

JOHN 11:1-45

- “When Jesus arrived in Bethany, 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; . . . 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 . . . “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 . . . “Yes, Lord, I have come to believe . . . you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.”

In the rest of this passage . . . it is written that “. . . Jesus wept.” . . . Remember, there were others around Jesus and Martha . . . some noticed the pain expressed by Jesus at the death of his friend Lazarus . . . and others were cynical . . . “Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?”

"Take away the stone," "Lazarus, come out!" "Untie him and let him go."

I. Here is a question to consider: Just what did Jesus accomplish in terms of His mission the day he raised Lazarus from the dead? Anything ?????

I am going to suggest that, **if** raising Lazarus from the dead was a critical element of the mission Jesus was sent to fulfill, not only was it less than successful . . . but it was a cruel tease to Lazarus . . . as well as Martha and Mary . . .

It was less than successful since not everyone became his champion following His raising of His friend Lazarus . . . not then . . . not even today . . .

Jesus did all **sorts** of things when he was alive . . . he forgave sinners . . . he healed lepers . . . restored hearing to the deaf . . . sight to the blind . . . speech to the mute . . . he cured the sick . . . he turned water into wine . . . he fed thousands with a few loaves of bread and a few fish . . . the list of what Jesus did just during His short life is extensive . . . not forgetting even things that He continues to do now . . . but all of these proved less than successful then . . . perhaps, less than successful even today . . . especially if our belief in Jesus Christ is based on just what we expect He will do for us . . . what tangible proof He must offer us that to prove He is real . . .

If Jesus' intention of raising Lazarus from the dead was intended to accomplish something in terms of His mission .

. . . than it was also a cruel tease to Lazarus, Martha and Mary . . . since after all . . . while we are not certain as to why Lazarus died . . . nor what caused his death . . . it is evident that not only did he experience death but possibly, even some time prior to his actual death, when he may have experienced the process of dying . . . something that may not have been all that pleasant or comfortable . . . and now . . . now, Lazarus, raised by His friend . . . he would wind up dying again, at some point . . . he would have to experience that journey again . . .

As for Martha and Mary . . . they would have to go through the whole grieving experience AGAIN, presuming that they live longer than Lazarus . . .

If the whole point of Jesus raising His friend Lazarus from the dead was a critical element of the mission Jesus was sent to fulfill . . . then yes, it was a cruel tease for Lazarus, Martha and Mary . . . for their friends and others . . . perhaps, even for us . . .

II. What Martha does, tells me . . . tells us . . . is that Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead was not a primary element of Jesus' mission . . . Rather . . . Jesus' mission, while it undoubtedly included these wonderful miracles and signs and wonders . . . was about something more . . . it was about humanity seeing Him as God's most perfect expression of love . . . of mercy . . . of compassion . . . and

in so doing, knowing that God had not given up . . . that God had not abandoned what God had created . . . promising to: “open [our] graves and have [us] rise from them,” . . . not limited to the graves that hold our dead remains . . . but the very graves we can carry with us . . . that bury the life within us as the result of our turning away from God . . . Yes, the God who not only promised to “open [our] graves and have [us] rise from them . . . but who wants nothing more than to put more than His life breath in us . . . no, this God wants to “put [His] spirit in [us so] that [we might] live”.

What Martha does tells me . . . tells us that it was about seeing Jesus as Martha saw Him . . . **even before he raised Lazarus from the dead** . . . seeing Jesus as, and believing that Jesus was, indeed “the resurrection and the life;” That Jesus was the one that, “whoever believes in Him, even if they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in Him will never die.” It was and is about seeing and believing that Jesus “is the Christ, the Son of God, the one who [isn’t simply] “coming into the world.” . . . but has come into the world . . . giving us a way . . . a path . . . to ultimate communion with God . . . one we glimpse now . . . experience now . . . taste now . . . and one, **if we are faithful**, we will enjoy for all eternity.

III. As the late Biblical Scholar, John J. Pilch has written,

“Faith in . . . Jesus . . . is not simply a pledge of resurrection on the last day but is rather a present and continuing participation in the life of the ever-living Jesus now . . . at this moment . . . Those who believe in Jesus never truly die.” . . . And I would add . . . not only believe in Jesus . . . but in placing Him at the center of our lives . . . live in such a way as to bring Him to bear on every element of our life . . . and bring Him to share with every person we meet.

That was the fundamental mission of Jesus then . . . and continues to be His mission now . . . and Martha confessed her belief in this . . . her belief in Him . . . without hesitation . . . without waiting for what He would do for her to alleviate her grief . . .

That was and is what Jesus’ ultimate Mission is about . . . He accomplished in in Martha . . . has He accomplished it in you?