

Lent 5th Sunday (A)

3rd April 2022

'Raising of Lazarus: Hints of resurrection'

Ezek 37: *I shall raise you from your graves, my people.*

Ps 129: *If you, O Lord, were to mark our guilt, who would survive?*

Rom 8: *He who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also.*

Jn 11: 1–45: the raising of Lazarus

Today we have heard the third of the three long Gospel passages from St John: a third encounter of Jesus which allows Him to reveal Himself and so to deepen faith. In the previous weeks, first the Samaritan woman, and then the man born blind, at least recognise *"I see you are a prophet, sir,"* but Jesus Himself has to reveal to them that He is the Messiah: *"I who am speaking to you, I AM He."* But here He is amongst friends: Martha, Mary & Lazarus. And Martha already feels in her heart: *"You are the Christ, the Son of God, the One who was to come into this world."* As we move towards the end of Lent and enter Passiontide — and as we too acknowledge Christ to be the Lord of our lives and our hearts — let's use this passage, as in previous weeks, to examine our consciences, especially taking note of anything we should bring to Confession before Easter:

1. **Hospitality.** The first thing we note is the tender care that Martha & Mary take of Jesus. Even as He enters

this troubling time of His approaching Passion, they give Him a homely welcome. What about us? Are there any people/friends/relations to whom we should be offering some hospitality? Or simply anyone to whom we could be more open-hearted; anyone instead we're avoiding, or shutting out of a kindly relationship or friendship? Anyone we've neglected in this regard?

2. Mary & Martha had lost their brother, Lazarus, and were still caught up in the **grief of his death**. Our Lord comes into this situation of loss, and brings His divinity, His authority, and His compassion to bear. So, we must ask ourselves how we care for the frail and the dying. Do we make sure that we give extra attention to those whose lives are coming towards their end? We may have fears about death, but those who are dying need our love & presence more than ever. Our physical presence may be prevented, by all sorts of impossible barriers — as mine was, by hospital protocol, when my Mum was ill in January — but our closeness through prayer, through phone calls, and cards sent, was a

lifeline, and a grace-filled support to her. Additionally, we should be diligent about arranging the sacraments for them — the visit of a hospital chaplain, for example. Indeed, those terminally ill and dying should be very close to us in prayer; it's a sacred duty, that they be sustained by the Holy Spirit in their great hour of need.

3. Also: we need to ask ourselves if we are giving the right **care for the bereaved**. Supporting those who have lost a loved one takes time and can't be rushed; it demands patience and faithful love, perhaps over many months, and beyond. One of the 'spiritual works of mercy' that the Church places before us for our keeping is 'To comfort the sorrowful' — how better to live this out than to make sure that the bereaved are cared for? Is there anyone we think of that we've neglected in this regard? Is there someone I should be in touch with?
4. And finally, as we hear Martha making her **Proclamation of Faith**, yet still having doubts arise as Jesus asks for the tomb to be unsealed, we might ask ourselves about how we proclaim our faith. It's not

wrong to have doubts — let's not forget, Martha is a saint of the Church! — but we also need to accept and speak of the evidence that the Gospels place before us: all these signs of Jesus being the Son of God, which are historically true, and not just an opinion to take or leave. How seriously to hold on to these; how clearly do we express them in our lives to the benefit of others? Jesus's raising of Lazarus must have so increased Martha's faith; and indeed many others came to believe in Him with this miracle. This resuscitation of Lazarus back to life is a sign of the coming glorious Resurrection of Jesus Himself. But it is a good reminder that *even now* (even in this life — not just after death) Jesus can start to raise us up. He does this by raising us up out of our sins. In fact, how can we rise again at the last day if we have not let Jesus raise us up here on earth? Let's take courage from the spiritual life which Jesus is offering us: to raise us up and on to our feet, leaving the bandages of our sins behind. Let's have Jesus say to us in Confession soon, if He has not done so already this Lent, those happy words, *Unbind him, let him go free!*