

Lent 5th Sunday (A)

26th March 2023

‘Lent John texts III: Raising of Lazarus’

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

With today’s passage from Jn 11 we have the 3rd of the three great texts from St John traditionally associated with our journey through Lent towards Easter. With the **Samaritan Woman** we were shown that Jesus leads us from sin to faith; with the **Man Born Blind** we were shown that Jesus conquers blindness and gives new vision, including ‘seeing the light’ in faith; and today, then, the crowning glory of these three: the power Jesus shows over life and death, as He raises **Lazarus** from the dead ... but that’s also about faith, again, isn’t it? — the faith of Martha, and the faith of those many witnesses, the “many Jews [who] had come to Martha & Mary to sympathize with them over their brother.” So, these texts build to a crescendo: the miracles grow in awesomeness, but the focus remains one: *faith*. The Samaritan Woman, a non-Jew, needed help to renounce her life of sin and discover faith in Jesus; The Man Born Blind, in the Temple

precincts, knew for sure that Jesus was a prophet, but needed help moving to the greater acknowledgment of “falling down and worshipping Him”; and the friends of Jesus at Bethany, already devoted to Him of course, also needed that great new insight that He is “*the Resurrection and the Life.*” The miracles are spectacular, but Jesus only performs them in order to bring about an increase in faith.

Once again, as in the previous 2 wks, let’s see how this profound encounter of Jesus with His friends, and their guests, can lead us to examine our lives and consciences ...

- (i) The first theme is simply that of **hospitality**. Do we care for others in a way that is welcoming, kind and inclusive? Martha, Mary & Lazarus are known to us in the Gospel precisely for their open welcome to Jesus in His ministry. His was an exhausting Messianic itinerary, and the relaxing domestic life that He was able to enjoy with this family clearly brought some human relief. We need to ask if we are caring for those around us; are we looking out for one another, in the simple matters of the day-to-day, e.g. inviting someone to share a meal, have a chat, esp. if we can see that they’re not 100% happy. Are we

keeping our eyes and hearts open to those around us?

- (ii) A **care for the sick** is especially important. Martha & Mary call on Jesus to come and see their brother in his illness. We also need to be especially attentive, and patient, to those who are ill. And diligently to remember them in prayer. Are we regularly in touch with those who are sick; are we doing the most we can for them at a time of great anxiety? Is there anyone we are neglecting in this regard, given the precept of Jesus to His followers, that *corporal work of mercy*, to “visit the sick”?
- (iii) Then there’s the attention we should give to the **bereaved**. It’s not always easy to find words to comfort those who have lost someone. Maybe we feel inexperienced, out of our depth, or just too upset ourselves to have anything to offer. Yet, the bereaved are not first in need of complex therapies, just mostly in need of signs of kindness. Jesus sighs with sorrow for His dead friend, and opens His heart to the sisters who have lost their brother, and we should follow suit.
- (iv) **Care for the dead** is also a Christian demand, and above all we should never forget the deceased in our prayers. Let’s ask ourselves if we are remembering to pray for the

dead and to offer Mass for them: this is the *greatest thing we can do* for our deceased loved ones; and it’s good to pray and offer Mass also for those who are not likely to be remembered before God by anyone other than us!

- (v) Note how patiently Jesus teaches Martha, and brings her a new understanding of Christian salvation, and of Him as “*the Resurrection and Life*.” Are we as willing to be patient and **explain our faith**? The vast majority of humanity does not know Christ; and the vast majority of our friends possibly doesn’t, either. Are we giving time to let others ask questions about our faith, and to answer them lovingly and knowledgeably? We are that crucial link between them and Jesus Christ, their one chance, maybe, to hear the Gospel. Or do we try and avoid conversations about our faith? How can we ever be missionary disciples if we are not willing to be generous and give time to others’ questions about the faith. We do not need to be highly qualified to do that, but to speak of Jesus as we have come to know Him, personally.

So, there are 5 more aspects in our extended Lenten examination of life, as we seek to do God’s will, and have His forgiveness given us in Confession before Easter.