

Homily

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT (A)

March 29, 2020

Reading: Ezekiel 37:12-14
Psalm 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8(7)
Romans 8:8-11
John 11:1-45

Should We Ask God for a Miracle?

There are many parallels between where we are as a world of people today and this Sunday's Gospel. In the Gospel Lazarus' sisters ask Jesus to cure their seriously ill brother. They ask for his help because they know of his amazing power to cure instantaneously those who are sick.

Needless to say they are angered by his choice to delay in coming to save their brother from an untimely death. They do not understand that his delay is intended to show them the power and glory of God the Father. They do not understand that the "miracle" he will perform – a restoration and reunification of body and soul, something intended for all of us, was intended by God from the beginning of creation.

But there is another purpose to this Gospel. It teaches us something about the purpose of pain and distress in our lives. Clearly Martha and

Mary were distressed. Clearly, they were in pain about the premature, and in their minds, preventable death if only Jesus had come sooner.

We may find ourselves feeling a lot like Mary and Martha at this time in our lives. Most of us have never experienced anything like this. The deadly threat to ourselves and to those whom we love and cherish the most. The threat of whether we will be able to have the life we knew before this became real – generally a good life with economic security for most of us. A life that presented for most of us “first world problems” rather than “third world problems” of poverty and disease.

Some may ask: “If God is a loving God, why does pain and suffering exist in the world?” C.S. Lewis, the author of the *Chronicles of Narnia* among other great writings, perhaps put it best. He argued in several lectures that pain necessarily must exist in the world if free will is to exist, free will being a central purpose in the plan for God’s creatures. It is only with free will that we can choose to love or not love, to choose the good and not the evil, to accept or reject God’s offer of love and happiness for all eternity.

Lewis proposes that, if we as human beings are to exercise our free will, we must have a neutral playing field (i.e. the world) where we can freely exercise our choices to circumstances that affect our lives. He reasons that, if God were to rescue us from every pain and discomfort (maybe we would call that a miracle?), there would be no free will, no neutral playing ground, no choices for us to make.

And if there were no choices to make, then how would our own personal growth occur? How would we come to realize that we are creatures totally reliant upon a transcendent being whose purpose is to love us and to participate in our lives if only we ask?

Pain, inflicted upon all of us by this pandemic, demolishes our notions of earthly security and that we are self-reliant.

Pain makes us drop what we are holding so that we can embrace God instead.

Yes, we can and must pray for a miracle because pain and miracles are intrinsically related. It is when we are in pain that we ask for miracles.

But we should never forget that miracles can occur both incrementally or dramatically. The creation of wine can occur incrementally when water and grapes are mixed together and allowed to ferment over time. Or it can occur dramatically and instantly as happened at the wedding in Cana. Both are miracles. Life itself is a miracle. Indeed, the greatest miracle of all time was the Incarnation – God becoming man and participating in our lives.

So, yes, let's pray for a miracle – how this will occur we cannot foresee. It may take the brilliant insight of some scientist we've never heard of. It may disappear as quickly as it arrived. We don't and can't know the outcome. What we can do, however, is place our trust in God.

Let us simply get down on our knees and acknowledge our need for God's love and help, like Mary and Martha did.

And, like Martha, let us trust like she did when she said: "Even now, I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you."

Let us drop our self-illusions and embrace the love of God.
That will be the greatest miracle.