



PORTSMOUTH ABBEY

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Dear Oblates and Friends of Portsmouth,

In the final weeks of Lent the liturgical readings are concerned chiefly with Jesus' triumph over death and the promise of new life. Of all the miracle/signs in the Gospel of Saint John the most spectacular is the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Like the other signs, this one is given to verify Jesus' claim to be the Christ, the Son of God, and that "those who believe in him may have life in his name." But like the other signs, this too is intended to illustrate the various themes that recur throughout John's Gospel: light and darkness, belief and skepticism, death and rebirth, the eucharistic implications of Cana in the changing of water into wine, the multiplication of the loaves and fishes and the curing of the man born blind - each of these signs points inevitably to the supreme sign, the sign of Jonah and the Cross, for which the miracle of Lazarus is an extraordinary foreshadowing.

"O my people, you shall know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and have you rise from them." Ezekiel seems to prophesy this very event. What he is literally doing, of course, urging the captive Jews in the Babylonian exile to take courage from the promise that a new life in a rebuilt Jerusalem awaits them. In exile they may as well be dead, but with faith in their God, they will rise from their graves and be possessed of a new life in their own land. This is why the Lazarus miracle is such an appropriate reading for the funeral service, when death is put into its proper perspective: not as an end but as the beginning of the true life. ***"He who believes in me, though he should die, yet shall he live."***

In the Orthodox Church the raising of Lazarus is one of the scenes often depicted on the iconostasis, which stands before the altar. In his novel, **Crime and Punishment**, Dostoevski alludes to this miracle to bring about

the conversion of his hero (or anti-hero) Raskolnikov, who has murdered two sisters, one intentionally as a way of demonstrating his intellectual superiority to the moral law. The theme of the book is the gradual realization of Raskolnikov's sense of guilt and remorse through the influence of Sonia, the saintly prostitute, a friend of one of the sisters, who brings this about through her reading to him the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection from the dead. This is the climax of the book, which leads to his admission of guilt for committing the brutal murders through the sin of pride that has warped his judgment. The simple faith of the innocent Sonia is the heaven-sent instrument that has caused him to return to a belief in God and an awareness of the human family which he had rejected with a Nietzschean contempt. In the story of Lazarus he recognizes his restoration to life as a first step in his redemptive journey back to sanity, and faith in the power of Scripture and love for humanity symbolized in Sonia.

Eugene O'Neill, the leading American dramatist, wrote two plays with Christian themes, his final posthumously published masterpiece, "**A Long Day's Journey Into Night**," and his experimental play written early in his career, "**Lazarus Laughed**." Based on the legend that after he was raised from the dead by Jesus, Lazarus never again smiled. In his play, however, O'Neill reversed the fear of death by using laughter as a symbol of joy and an affirmation of life. This is what Lazarus learned from his triumph over death which has been overcome by belief in the redemptive power of Jesus, who is both Life and Light. O'Neill's play is not conventional theater and is generally dismissed by the critics as a literary failure, impossible to stage. But it does express his deeply felt religious conviction through the "theater of the imagination," presenting us with an original interpretation of the evangelist's climactic *miracle through* the laughter of Lazarus, having been freed from the bondage of death.

For both these authors, the resurrection of Lazarus was a unique way of looking at death and life, of belief and unbelief. It matters not that one of them is a recognized masterpiece and the other a neglected failure. For both the Russian and the American, Scripture has provided the power to give meaning to unlikely material which can have a positive effect on our lives. The Lazarus episode is an anticipation of the death and resurrection of Jesus shortly to take place and can make us, if we will, wiser in our understanding of Scripture, providing an added incentive for Easter to become a personal spiritual triumph, aided by the vision of two literary masters.

A Prayer for Passiontide

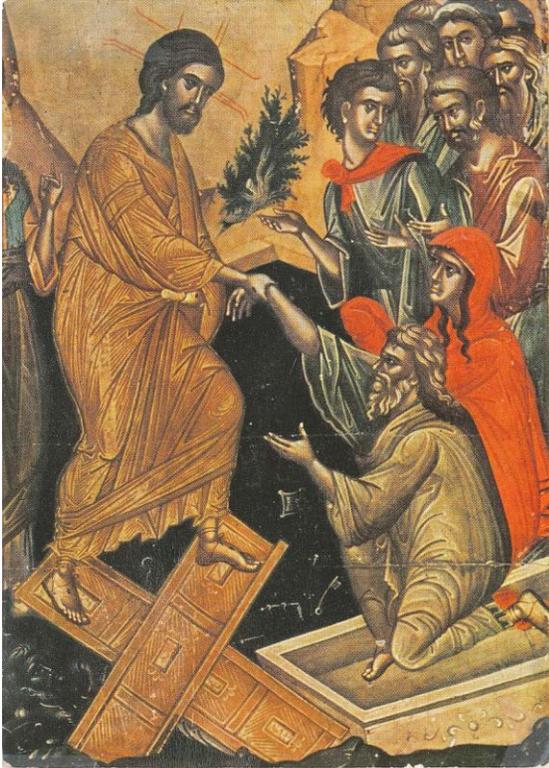
Dr. Samuel Johnson - 1773

Almighty God, by Whose mercy I am now about to commemorate the death of my Redeemer, grant that from this time I may so live that his death may be efficacious to my eternal happiness. Enable me to conquer all evil customs. Deliver me from evil and vexatious thoughts. Grant me light to discover my duty, and grace to perform it. As my life advances, let me become more pure and more holy. Take not from me thy Holy Spirit, but grant that I may serve thee with diligence and confidence; and when thou shalt call me hence, receive me to everlasting happiness, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Good Friday in my Heart Mary Elizabeth Coleridge (1861 – 1907)

*Good Friday in my heart! Fear and affright!
My thoughts are the Disciples when they fled,
My words the words that priest and soldier said,
My deed the spear to desecrate the dead.
And day, Thy death therein, is changed to night.*

*Then Easter in my heart sends up the sun,
My thoughts are Mary, when she turned to see,
My words are Peter, answering, 'Lov'st thou Me?'
My deeds are all Thine own drawn close to Thee,
And night and day, since Thou dost rise, are one.*



The Raising of Lazarus

“Lazarus, come forth,” Jesus cried out with a loud voice. The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth.

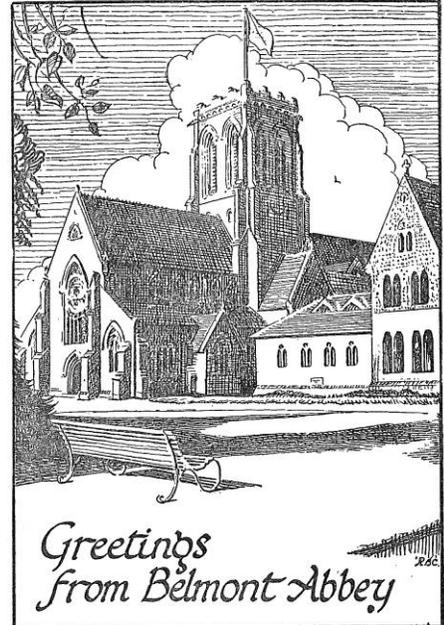
I am the resurrection and the life: whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live. And every one who lives and believes in me will never die.

LITURGICAL CALENDAR FOR MARCH

- 1 *St. David, Abbot/Bishop, Patron of Wales*
- 3 *St. Aelred, Abbot of Rievaulx*
- 6 **SUNDAY IV OF LENT (Laetare Sunday)**
- 7 *SS. Perpetua and Felicity, Martyrs*
- 13 **SUNDAY V OF LENT**
- 17 *St. Patrick, Bishop, Patron of Ireland*
- 19 **St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin**
- 20 **PALM SUNDAY (Passion of the Lord)**
Holy Week & Paschal Triduum
- 24 **Holy Thursday: *Mass of Last Supper***
- 25 **Good Friday: *Passion of the Lord***
- 26 **Holy Saturday: **EASTER VIGIL****
- 27 **EASTER SUNDAY: *Resurrection of the Lord***
- 28 – April 2 *Octave of Easter*

MONASTERY NOTES

The annual community retreat was given during the Christmas recess by the Abbot of Belmont Abbey in Herefordshire, Dom Paul Stonham. His conferences dealt with selected chapters of the Holy Rule, which had special significance for modern living situations. Belmont is situated in one of the most beautiful landscapes of England, amid rolling hills and pasture land, an ideal rural setting for the peaceful tranquility of a monastic house. The abbey church is one of particular Gothic beauty, the architect being E.W. Pugin, son of the noted designer of the Houses of Parliament.



The leading pictorial story of the town of Portsmouth during the past year was of Brother Joseph Byron relaxing on top of the abbey's wind turbine, filmed on video by a drone and watched by a reported 4 million onlookers in all parts of the world, including Russia, India and Chile. The stunning aerial views of the bay and countryside afforded excellent coverage of the spacious grounds of the monastery.

A number of receptions were held in early February in several cities of Florida in conjunction with a meeting of the Regents of the Abbey in Coral Gables situated near Miami. Representing the monastery were the Abbot, Dom Damian and Dom Joseph.

Seven members of the Manquehue Movement arrived from Chile in early January and are now housed in a former faculty residence which has become a monastic guest house for the use of groups such as this. Their purpose is to proclaim the Catholic faith to students at the secondary and collegiate level, concentrating on lay initiatives. At Portsmouth they are in close contact with the students, during classes and activities. One activity was to accompany a large group of the students on the annual March for Life, held in Washington, D.C., but this was cancelled because of the blizzard which struck the Capital.