

The Fifth Sunday of Lent – March 28-29, 2020

Lazarus was ill and dying – and yet, when Jesus was informed about it – he stayed where he was and allowed him to die. Why?

Last week, the disciples asked Jesus why the man was born blind – whether it was because of his sin or that of his parents. What did Jesus answer? He said it was not because of his or their sin that he was born blind, but that the glory of God might be revealed through him.

Jesus allowed Lazarus to die so that he might reveal not only his power to raise this man Lazarus to life, but to reveal his power to raise everyone from death to new life. Through raising Lazarus from death and two other persons earlier in the gospel, and then in his own death and resurrection, Jesus shows us that God has power over sin and death and over all things that bring suffering and death -- including our present-day coronavirus.

One of the main purposes of Lent is to help us step back and take an honest look at our life, our faith in God and our relationships – our values and our priorities.

If we have honestly done that, we will have to admit that we, including myself, all have some deadness in us and in our church communities – if nothing else, there is a lack of joy and fire that should be there in our faith.

The man Lazarus, who was ill and died, is actually us. As we have gone along in life and as a faith community we have all fallen into routines and deadness.

For example, at one time people may have looked at us and said, “boy, I wish I had his joy, his dedication, her helpfulness and happiness. Our life may have drawn people to God, but now people may be looking at us and not only not wanting to be like us, but even sometimes not really wanting to be around us. – For various reasons we fall away from our life in Christ and union with others and we sicken, and in various ways, even die.

It is often said that people have to hit bottom before they call out for help to change. I hope that we haven't gone that far down, but we all need some renewal of our life and faith during this grace-filled season of Lent. – In this Lent

of 2020 we, and all people of the world, are being pushed by the coronavirus to change our ways and these changes are making us think deeply about what is happening in our life and where we are going.

Like the woman at the well, we are being made more aware of our thirst for something more. Like the man born blind, we are being made to face our blindness and the need for Jesus to heal us and enable us to see God in our life and to see him as our loving Father.

Today we are recognizing the hard truth that following our own ways we like Lazarus, are ill and dying, but that Jesus has the power to bring us into ever greater life, and even now a share in eternal life. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's prophetic words in today's first reading -- "*O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them. – I will put my spirit in you that you may live.*"

Even in the midst of this pandemic, it is important to remember, as St. Paul tells us in today's second reading, that the Spirit of God dwells within us. The lifegiving Spirit overcomes death in us. It is important to remember that the Spirit who dwells within us is there to give us life.

These days, the whole world is trying to avoid being infected with the coronavirus. For us during Lent, we need to do something in the opposite direction. We need to open ourselves to be infected and filled with the fire and life that was and is in Jesus. What happened with Lazarus was not a one-time thing, as we said. This is what Jesus can and wants to do in all people. Instead of avoiding Jesus, we need to get close to him and let ourselves be infected by his life – that is – we need to open ourselves daily to encounter Jesus as Pope Francis says.

How can we do that?

All of us are called to see and proclaim the marvelous deeds of God. From Psalm 145 we hear these words: "*Age to age shall proclaim your work -- shall declare your mighty deeds. Let me speak the praise of the Lord, let all mankind bless his holy name for ever.*"

Even in the midst of all the stress and suffering of this pandemic we are seeing many wonderful things happening – signs of God's presence and Spirit at work everywhere.

We are called to proclaim these actions of God to **all**, but before we do that, let us, first of all, lift up the goodness of God with those closest to us and around us.

My spiritual director last week gave me the assignment to write down all the answers to prayer that I become aware of between now and Easter.

The thing I would suggest to you is to take some time every evening and go around the table or room at your home and share where you saw or were touched by God's grace that day. Proclaim the mighty deeds of God to each other! In this time of social distancing let us get closer to Jesus and help our loved ones to do the same.

The author of the book the bishop gave to us this Christmas says that the one of reasons that the fire has gone out of our personal and parish community life is that we have spent too much time talking about the what and the how of our faith and not about the who and the why. Our faith is not knowing about God or Jesus, but about friendship with the person of Jesus who is the center of our faith and the one sent by God our Father to bring us back into the fire and love of the Holy Trinity. As Jesus said in today's gospel – ***I** am the resurrection and the life – whoever believes in **me**, even if he dies, will live.” As the quote from Pastor Jared in the local paper said – “Things come and go, but God remains.”*

Be careful – wash your hands – keep your social distance, but in these hectic and fearful times, open your self to see and encounter God's presence and action everywhere in your life and in the world. Be filled more and more with the fire and joy and life that is in God and be ready to share this good news and hope that the world needs to hear about from us. Use these days to get closer to God and to our loved ones.