

Fr. Ed Suszynski
5th Sunday of Lent, Year A
Homily/Reflection

“Lord, by now there will be a stench,” (John 11:39b). In order to help bring some levity to our sheltering in place, I’d like to begin with this passage that we hear from the Gospel on the 5th Sunday of Lent, Year A. When we smell a stench, it typically is an odor that is not pleasant and might catch us off guard. Maybe it has been the case for some of us that we have been metaphorically starting to smell a stench in our shelter in place mode. I say this in the sense that, we’ve now been exposed to a lifestyle that has that was expected and sometimes when that happens, whether it be over exposure to family, when we’re not used to it, or being cooped up inside, we start to discover annoyances or other things that are not pleasant. It is good for us to be aware of these things, name them for what they are, and allow the Lord to help us forge new paths with each other. In any of our sufferings or sacrifices, the goal is to allow this to be a response to a deeper invitation from the Lord to unite our sufferings with His.

We experience this theme in the Gospel when Jesus first learns of Lazarus’ illness and decides not to go immediately to Lazarus but rather, Jesus stays put. At first, we might think, why is He doing this? If Jesus were a doctor, we’d probably sue Him for malpractice. We may even wonder, well if Jesus loved Lazarus, why would He do this? At the same time, we cannot separate Jesus’ actions and his word, for Jesus says, *This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.* This indicates to us that we are also partakers of Christ’s sufferings and also His resurrection. The glory of God proclaimed, the Good News, is that Jesus has victory over the grave. The raising of Lazarus show us that in God alone, is there true life, both in this world and in the world to come, to the Lord belongs the victory.

This is where the element of surrender becomes particularly operative because we not only see this in this particular story, but it’s real life too. For example, if you look to the Saints of the Church, the same story is lived out. In the life of St. Therese of Lisieux or St. John Paul 2nd the Great and so many others, there are periods of suffering whether it be tuberculosis, Parkinson’s disease, or something else. Could we say for those who were so great faith that God did not love them because they suffered? No. Rather, we can see that their faith in the God led to victory in eternal life. Through their suffering, they showed us how to enter more fully into the sufferings and surrender of Christ.

This is the last Gospel we hear before Palm Sunday next weekend. It is fitting that we hear this message because through the course of the Paschal Mystery (the life, death, and resurrection of Christ) proclaimed during this most holy week, we need to keep in mind that suffering and the cross lead to resurrection. Too often we can get wrapped up in our sufferings, or thoughts, or worries. It is in these moments that we get stuck at the cross; we forget to consider the other side.

Surrender and Victory are Gospel, Good News to us in these days. I suspect that many of us have worries and concerns. Fear itself might have a particular grip upon us in some way. But what is the greatest fear? Is it the fear of the unknown or could it be fearing surrender? Could choosing fear over faith, of not trusting that God will see us through, not be worse?

The Good News is that we never have to have these fears and doubts. Whatever the devil or the media or other influences may bombard us with, we must keep in mind, the victory belongs to Christ. Mary, help of Christians, is our friend and guide here. Mary, while she was at the Cross, did not have thousands of years of theology, history, etc. to know what was going to happen, she had her faith, she knew God was faithful to His promises, and in His will be done, all would be alright. Like Mary at the Cross, we might not know what next week, next month, or next year might bring, but we know the faithfulness of our God and His Triumph over the Grave.

This week, heed the Lord's words to Lazarus, "Come out." In this, allow the Lord to take from you anything that may bind you in fear, doubt, or anxiety and live in the light of God's promise. The Lord has triumphed over the grave, this is at the core of our faith, let it be at the core of who we choose to be, every day, pandemic or not. Amen.