

Funeral homily for Ryan Klem

James Tissot (pronounced tea- so) was an accomplished French artist who lived in the second half of the nineteenth century. In one of his best remembered oil paintings, now housed in the Brooklyn museum, a bearded man attired in a long flowing white robe is standing on a hillside, his head buried in his hands. He is surrounded by a handful of people, who are in mourning.

The mysterious figure in the white robe is Christ.

He is weeping.

Tissot's work is startling. There are very few artists who attempt to capture on canvas a disconsolate Jesus. No doubt the painter was inspired by John's account of the raising of Lazarus as recorded in his eleventh chapter.

"And Jesus, when he saw her in tears and the tears of the Jews who accompanied her, sighed deeply, and distressed himself over it.

"Where have you buried him? He asked. "Lord", they said, come and see"

"Then Jesus wept". "See", said the Jews, how much he loved them".

Since Jesus has the power to restore life to the dead--- his friend Lazarus--- why does he weep? One answer is that he is not insensitive to the suffering of others. His tears are shed for the grieving family and friends of Lazarus, and not the dead himself. His great love is evident in his tears. As the great John Henry Newman said: "He wept from great sympathy with the grief of others".

The tears of Jesus are the tears of God.

In today's first reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes, the inspired author tells us that there is a time to mourn and a time to weep.

Today is such a day. We mourn the passing of our friend.

We also recall with sadness the tears of a young five year old boy who lost his father at a very young age. The emotional reaction of the youth was nothing less than intense: Tears, sorrow, anger, confusion and sadness. He asked, "Why was my father taken away from me? He never really recovered from the tragedy. Ever since his father's death he has been in a dark place where light was clearly absent in his once beautiful soul.

But the young man never lost his faith. He was a weekly communicant of Sacred Heart Church. He would sometimes take up the collection and sanitize the pews after mass. He appreciated his schoolboy days at Sacred Heart and never forgot all the times when I, as a young priest, played racquetball with him and his friends.

Death is a powerful teacher and has many important lessons to teach us. We learn from death that nothing in this world lasts forever and that everything in this life passes away.

But the good news is that God, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, has promised to wipe away all our tears from all faces and that he will destroy death forever.

In the creed, we make a bold declaration: "I believe in everlasting life". In the aftermath of a sudden, unexpected death, we are assured by Christ that our greatest enemy does not have the final word. Love is stronger than death, amen.