



Homily for 3/29/2020

Fifth Sunday of Lent A

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The psalm for today is the “De Profundis”, “Out of the Depths”, that the Church uses often when someone has died. It is a cry from the heart because of a profound loss. It is a cry from the poor to the Lord. In the face of death, which makes us all equal, the rich and the poor alike, there is only one in whom we can place our trust. That is the Lord our God. “I trust in the LORD; my soul trusts in his word.”

The Lord hears the cry of the poor. When we are faced with the reality and inevitability of death, if we place our trust in Jesus, we will not be disappointed. This is what St. Paul reminds us of in his letter to the Romans when he says: “Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit dwelling in you.”

This faith in the power of resurrection that is our hope is the fulfillment of the prophesy of Ezekiel, “O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them.” This hope is also made manifest for us in the story of Lazarus.

This is a story that involves much compassion and human emotion and is very poignant for our time in this present pandemic. Jesus’ compassion helps us to learn how to react to this present crisis. Let us follow the story with the eyes and ears of faith. Let us encounter the Lord as he comforts us in a time of trial and distress. Jesus hears that his friend Lazarus is sick. “Master, the one you love is ill.” Jesus then immediately expresses a word of Hope: “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.”

The Gospel goes out of its way to emphasize Jesus’ love for this family: “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.” This is done because immediately afterwards, we hear of Jesus’ strange action. Normally we would respond to news of our friend’s illness by hurrying to meet him and help him. But in the Gospel we read, “So when he heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place where he was.” This might make us doubt his true love for him. But our faith and trust in Jesus leads us to open up a place of hope that something even greater than death will be revealed: “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 faith and trust in Jesus’ love for each one of us allows us also to have hope in this present crisis of pandemic. We question Him. Why does the Lord delay? Why must we remain isolated and distant from one another? Why can’t we come to Church on Sunday and celebrate Mass and receive the Eucharist? Lord, your friends are calling to you out of the depths to come to our aid. Why do you delay? And the Spirit speaks to our hearts, “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.”

Martha ran to meet Jesus as he approached. Martha had learned to seek the face of Jesus after he had admonished her with being busy about worldly things. There is only one thing that matters, to sit at the feet of Jesus and gaze upon Him. She expresses now her faith in Jesus, even in the face of death. “Even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.” Do we pray with that kind of faith? Jesus then declares the truth about who he is: “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” She said to Him, “Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.” We express this same profession of faith every time we pray the Creed. Does it change us? Do we allow Hope to grow in our hearts? Does it bring us peace and allow us to react differently to the insecurities and brokenness of this world?

Notice how Mary reacted to the call of Jesus: “ ‘The teacher is here and is asking for you.’ As soon as she heard this, she rose quickly and went to him.” This is the attitude of obedience in prayer. When the Lord calls, we get up immediately to pray and we go into the interior of our hearts, where Jesus is. There she wept with Jesus, and Jesus



wept with her. Do we go into the interior of our hearts, throwing ourselves at the feet of Jesus, and pour out our troubles and worries before Him? This is true prayer, and Jesus is moved by it. He weeps with us in our sorrow. When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her weeping, he became perturbed and deeply troubled ... And Jesus wept. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him.”

But then came the words of doubt: “Some of them said, ‘Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?’ ” These are the ones who think in worldly terms and do not truly believe in Jesus’ love for Lazarus, for them, for each one of us. They are still thinking of what worldly benefit He can give to make life more comfortable. But Jesus has bigger and better plans in mind, “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.” Do I doubt Jesus’ love for me when I see that He works miracles for others, and He doesn’t do the same for me? Is my love for Him relying solely on the miracles and wonders He does, or do I need to purify my love for Him?

Moved by compassion, Jesus commanded that the stone be moved from the grave: “Take away the stone.” But Martha, the dead man’s sister, said to him, “Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days.” How often do we object to the Lord’s commands? How often do we try to prevent him from going to the exact place of our grief? How often do we make excuses to prevent Jesus from encountering even the messiest parts of our lives? But Jesus responds with an invitation of faith and trust in Him: “Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?” He asks the same to us as He stands at the door of our hearts and knocks. Take away the rock so that he might enter.

Jesus prayed, looking up to heaven. We must imitate Him. Let our eyes and our hearts rise to heaven during this pandemic. Let us cry out with a loud voice out of the depths, that death and our despair might be cast out. Let us pray that the Lord might loosen the burial clothes that bind our hands and feet in our doubt, pain and sorrow.

My friends, the Lord Jesus Christ loves you. Take away the stone that prevents Him from entering and let us rejoice in the Hope of the Resurrection that is promised to all of us who believe. Let this present situation of Coronavirus, social distancing and lack of public gatherings be for the Glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified through it!

May Jesus Christ be praised!