

The Deacon's Bench



by Deacon
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The Fifth Sunday of Lent: From Death to Life

Reflections
on Sacred
Scripture

Today, the Fifth Sunday of Lent, we celebrate the final Scrutiny with our Elect as they prepare for Baptism. Along with them we too prepare to embrace the implications in our own baptism which may have been dormant. This Sunday, we hear the death-to-life story of the 'Raising of Lazarus.'

While there are many details related to Lazarus' illness, his demise, and preparation for burial, the central theme of this account is life, not death. The Raising of Lazarus demonstrates that Christ does not merely heal our lives, – he restores them from death. Today Jesus confronts death directly.

The death of Lazarus represents humanity bound by mortality and sin. He is everyman, he is a personal friend of Jesus as are his sisters, Martha and Mary. His sisters, too, represent all of us in their expressions of grief, of hope, and of trust in the power of God made manifest in Martha's profession, "You are the Christ, the Son of God."

The sisters respond to the news of their brother's death in very different ways representing the spectrum of human grief and helplessness. But it is Martha's wrenching cry to which we can painfully relate, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died". How many of us have uttered a version of that cry in the face of the death of a loved one? Lord, if only you had been here, if only you answered my prayer.....

Jesus, who seems to have waited until Lazarus was dead and buried for several days before he came to the tomb, prays fervently to the Father before commanding the man in the tomb, "Lazarus, come out!" He says this to all of us, come out from bondage, out from despair and spiritual death. And Lazarus returns to life, still bound by his burial cloths prompting Jesus to say to the bystanders and his sisters, "Unbind him and let him go."

As a community of faith, we all have a part to play in 'unbinding' one another, in helping our brothers and sisters to be freed from the bonds of sin and death – and letting them help us in turn. Jesus in his full humanity and his full divinity raises Lazarus from the dead, his community of faith brings his liberation to completion. We are in this together. Resurrection is not an improvement, but a new creation.

As together we celebrate the final Scrutiny and pray with our Elect, we help prepare our candidates and one another for the Easter encounter with the Water of Baptism, the Light of the Paschal Candle, and Risen Life found complete in the Holy Eucharist.