

Fifth Sunday of Lent – March 17, 2024

Readings: Ez 37:12–14 • Ps 130:1–2, 3–4, 5–6, 7–8 • Rom 8:8–11 • Jn 11:1–45

When we encounter the Lord Jesus in today's Gospel, he is at his low point, at the nadir of his popularity. He's away from the main stage, away from Jerusalem. He received word that one of his closest friends, Lazarus, is dead. Jesus waits three days, foreshadowing the time He will spend in the tomb, before going to see Lazarus' sisters, Martha and Mary. The Lord loves these women. They are his friends and he delights in their company. He delays his arrival outside of Bethany so that the glory of God can be shown.

He finds his dear friends, these women whom he loves and who love him, weeping, with Martha, filled with confusion, yet with faith in the one she has come to know as God, confronts Him. Then we see Jesus at His most human, (recall the shortest verse in all of Scripture: "Jesus wept"). Jesus is sad, crying with and for Martha, Mary, and His deceased friend, Lazarus. He is truly sorrowful, grieving in His human nature, but He does not despair.

We see the Lord Jesus at His most human in this Gospel, but then, suddenly we see Him at His most Divine. By His own power as divine, He raises the long dead, stinking, rotting Lazarus (remember the verse in the King James Version: "He stinketh") from the dead. This was not just resuscitation of a dying or comatose man; this was a resurrection from death. And this is the greatest sign of who Jesus is, the most undeniable proof of His Divine Sonship until He rises from the dead at Easter. *What's the difference between the raising of Lazarus and the resurrection of Jesus? The Lord is raised to eternal life; Lazarus is raised to earthly life. Lazarus will die once more on earth, but the Lord Jesus will never die.*

Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb, and we read that Lazarus comes out, bound hand and foot. The Lord says these simple words: "Untie him, and let him go free." A simple question: if he was bound, hand and foot, as the Gospel recounts, how then did he come out of the tomb? Did he hope? According to Saint Bernard, Lazarus just floated out. Regardless of that aside, Lazarus is raised to earthly life by the Lord Jesus as a foreshadowing of what will so soon occur to the Lord Jesus Himself.

With this in mind, what is the Lord Jesus saying to us today? The same Jesus, who is fully human and fully divine is calling to us, beckoning us to let Him untie us and to let us go free.

What's tying us up and refusing to let us go free? I'd venture to guess it is sin. Jesus wants us to be free from sin, so He offers us the beauty of the sacrament of penance, something of which we should all partake often, especially in these last days of Lent, as we venture onward towards Holy Week.

What tangling us in its web? What is ensnaring us in layers of linen that so binds us? Is it worry? Is it lack of knowledge of what will come next? Is it despair? We need a break, a day when we don't receive a gut punch, making us as a college, a Church, a world, fall to our knees gasping for breath.

It is Jesus alone who can heal us. Look to the fact that in March of 2020, the Holy Father, Pope Francis, in what many believe is his finest moment as the Supreme Pontiff, alone on a rainy, cold night in an empty piazza, one only a few weeks prior teeming with life, offered the greatest *Urbi et Orbi* of modern days — a blessing not from himself, as the Vicar of Christ on Earth, but from God HIMSELF, Christ, the Lord, truly present sacramentally in the Eucharist.

Only Jesus can make that first incision, only he holds the scissor. Jesus is there, loving us, gently unwrapping the layers that bind us and cause us not to live in the freedom of the sons and daughters of God. But we can help, too, once that first thread is pulled. This is our task now as brothers and sisters of Christ and of one another.