

Fifth Sunday of Lent “The Glory of God”

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My friends, we have been on a pilgrimage these last several weeks! We began our pilgrimage of Lent by following our Lord into the desert for forty days and forty nights to fast and pray. On the Second Sunday, Jesus led us to a mountaintop for the transfiguration. We were invited to look at the areas of our lives that need transformation. Jesus then led us to Samaria where we met the woman at the well. We thirsted with her for the life giving waters of baptism. Last week, Jesus introduced us to the man born blind. We were invited to gain spiritual sight that comes from faith. This week, we follow Jesus to the tomb of Lazarus. Jesus gives us his most powerful “I am” statement, the title God gives himself in Exodus, when he says, “I am the resurrection and the life”. We are amazed to learn that Jesus has power over death itself.

My friends, Ezekiel says it, doesn't he? “Thus says the Lord God: O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them!” I have shared with you before one of my favorite quotes from early Church father, St. Irenaeus of Lyons who said, “Gloria Dei est vivans homo”, the Glory of God is a living human being. It has also been loosely translated, the Glory of God is a human being fully alive. What does that mean? It means that God is happy when we are as alive we can be. Furthermore, it means also the opposite, God is unhappy when we are not fully alive. Naturally, when Jesus comes to us, he comes as a healer. He comes to raise people from the dead, physically indeed but also spiritually. In fact, in the Gospels, Jesus raised three people from the dead in his ministry, Jarius' daughter, the widow of Naim's son, and Lazarus.

St. Augustine had some very interesting things to say about the three miracle stories recalling Jesus raising people from the dead. Notice that Jarius' daughter died in the house! He is interested that the death occurred in the house. The house represents the soul for St. Augustine. The daughter's death represents the death inside us due to sin that has affected only our inner selves. Jesus wants to raise us up from even that little kind of spiritual death. Notice that the widow of Naim's son is carried outside of the house after he died. This kind of death represents the sin within us that not only affects the inside of our souls but also our outer person. This spiritual death has made an effect on the person we are. Jesus wants to raise us up from that kind of death.

And now we have the story of Lazarus. Lazarus is not only outside of the house but he is in the tomb. Indeed, when Jesus commands them to “roll away the stone”, Martha cautions Jesus, “Lord, by now there will be a stench. He has been dead for four days”. St. Augustine remarks that the spiritual death described by Lazarus' death is the sin that has not only affected the inner soul. Indeed, this spiritual death has not only affected the outer soul. The spiritual death of Lazarus represents the sinfulness that makes our lives stink to other people around us, it has affected our relationships, and has killed the person God intended us to be.

And look at Jesus when he learns the fate of his friend Lazarus. It says Jesus wept. Now this is God. God is weeping for Lazarus. Furthermore, it says Jesus perturbed and deeply troubled. God is perturbed and deeply troubled because God hates death. Like St. Irenaeus, the glory of God is a human being fully alive. And so, Jesus commands us to roll away the stone.

You see, one of the saddest things I hear as a priest is when someone tells me that they cannot go to confession and seek reconciliation because they think their sin is unforgivable. Some people even decide against going to church regularly because they feel like God doesn't love them. Christians, the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ is that while we were still sinners, Jesus died for us on the cross. That is how much God loves us. This means that there is no sin that cannot be forgiven, no spiritual death that can't be brought back to life.

The invitation this Lent is to come to the living water like the woman at the well. The invitation is regain spiritual sight like the man blind since birth. The invitation is rise from the dead like Lazarus. My friends, what are the areas in our lives that are like a corpse? What are the areas in our spirit life that is tied up, unable to move like a body confined to a coffin? What is the stone that is blocking us from the love of Jesus? What bolder is blocking us from resurrection and new life?

And Jesus said, roll away the stone. Roll away the stone! The glory of God is a human being fully alive!