

Fifth Sunday of Lent “Lazarus”  
Fr. Frank Schuster

My friends, at the other Masses these past few weeks we have been considering the C cycle readings. That homily is available on my website. This mass has been focused on the A cycle readings because we are journeying with our RCIA class as they prepare for their Easter Sacraments, as is the tradition in the Catholic Church. A little recap, all the Sunday Masses began the pilgrimage of Lent by following our Lord into the desert for forty days and forty nights to fast and pray. On the second Sunday, all the Masses followed Jesus up mount Tabor for the transfiguration and invited to look at the areas of our lives that need transformation. The 11 AM Mass took a detour into the A cycle readings on the third Sunday of Lent with a focus on the Gospel of St. John, travelling with Jesus 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 in the Gospel 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!

St. Irenaeus of Lyons said, “Gloria Dei vivans homo”. Bishop Barron likes to translate that loosely, albeit appropriately, “the Glory of God is a human being fully alive”. Let's hear that again, the Glory of God is a human being fully alive. What does that mean? It means that God is happy when we are the most fully 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.

The resuscitation of Lazarus is a powerful Gospel reading that carries with it a profound message. Of course, this wasn't the only time Jesus resuscitated someone from death in the Gospels. Jesus rose 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. St. Augustine wants us to first of all 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. For Augustine, this kind of death represents the sin within us that not only affects the inside of our souls but also our other 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.

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 groaned. God is groaning because God hates death. Like St. Irenaeus, *Gloria Dei vivans homo*, the glory of God is a human being fully alive. And so, Jesus commands us to roll away the stone.

Christians, the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ is that there is no sin that cannot be forgiven. I take exception when people say all Catholicism is about is guilt. We are accused of heaping in people's shoulders guilt. My take is, Catholicism is the only religion that offers us a way out of the guilt, by recognizing that Christ gave us the sacrament of reconciliation for the forgiveness of sins.

The invitation this Sunday, as we reflect on the last few weeks, is to come to the living water like the woman at the well. The invitation is to regain spiritual sight like the man blind since birth. The invitation is rise from the dead like Lazarus.

My friends, let's ask ourselves: 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? Let's ask ourselves: what is the stone that is blocking us from resurrection and new life. And Jesus says, roll away the stone.

Next week is Palm Sunday! Prepare the way for the Lord!