

SUNDAY MEDITATION

The Fifth Sunday in Lent, Year A

In the readings for the Fifth Sunday of Lent, we can see clear preparation for Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. As we grow closer to Holy Week, the Church is helping us ready our hearts to meditate deeply on the Lord's sacrifice and love for us.

This Sunday's Gospel recounts the story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead. The siblings of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus are all saints. And they can teach us how being friends with Jesus can change us and deepen our faith.

First Reading: Ezekiel 37:12-14

Psalm 130:1-8

Second Reading: Romans 8:8-11

Gospel: John 11:1-45

The story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is a fulfillment of the words in the first reading from Ezekiel that God would raise His people from the dead. The true fulfillment of this Old Testament passage is found in Jesus' death and resurrection in which He opens up the graves of all who are dead (in sin) in order that they might rise with Him.

There are three accounts of Jesus raising people from the dead. There is Jairus' daughter (Lk 8:40-56), the son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7:11-17), and Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44).

This last raising of the dead of Lazarus is a foreshadowing of Jesus' own death and resurrection. John makes this clear with the small details in this story that point to his later in the Gospel recounting the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

John points out at the beginning of this passage that the sister of Lazarus is Mary who had anointed Jesus with the costly ointment which Jesus noted was done in preparation for His burial. (Jn 12:3,7) John also records Thomas' words that the disciples should go with Jesus back to Judea where He is in danger of death, "That we may die with Him." (Jn 11:16) John notes that the stone must be moved away (Jn 11:39) and the burial cloths were wrapped around Lazarus (Jn 11:44).

This account of the raising of Lazarus from the dead helps us understand two ideas.

- First, the account is a foreshadowing of Jesus' own resurrection. Unlike Jairus' daughter and the son of the widow of Nain, Lazarus had actually been buried. He was in a tomb with a stone placed in front of the entrance. It had been several days after his death so the story is clear that Lazarus was actually dead. Yet despite what obviously points to his not returning from the dead was transformed by Jesus who calls Lazarus from the dead back to life. It was an amazing miracle and if you place yourself there, you can imagine how astounded you would be that the man you knew was dead is suddenly in front of you and very much alive.

- Second, the account reminds us of our condition. We are dead in sin. We are bound up in burial cloths that keep us from moving. We are without hope. Then Jesus comes along and without any prompting or request from us, because we are dead, he mercifully brings us to life.

And it is through Jesus' resurrection that we are fully brought to life. As St. Paul noted, if Jesus was not raised from the dead we are lost and without hope.

Instead, Jesus has given us the greatest gift of all which is eternal life through his death and resurrection. By our acceptance and cooperation with His grace, we can enjoy that life forever. All three of the people Jesus raised from the dead would eventually undergo a final natural death. Yet, through God's mercy, they and we can have that great gift of eternal life.

May God bless you and keep you safe!

Beata Bosak