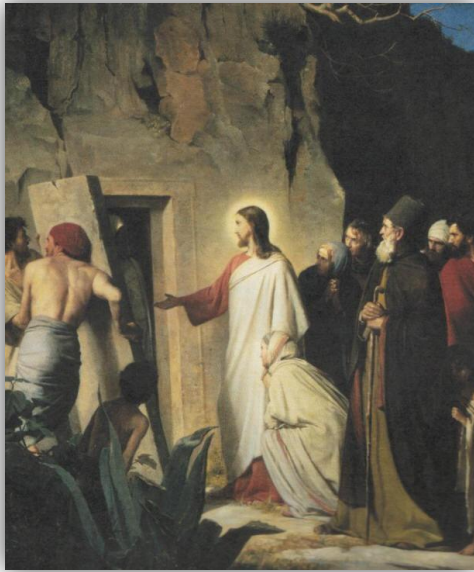


"Lazarus, Come Forth."



Holy Week begins on the Saturday of Lazarus. It begins with a resurrection (Lazarus) and it ends with a resurrection (Christ). Thus, Holy Week is placed between two brilliant shafts of light which illuminate the darkness of the Cross with meaning and ultimate joy.

Before this, Jesus had raised at least two others from the dead. One was the daughter of Jairus, the other was the only son of the widow of Nain. The first had just died; the second was being carried to the cemetery in his coffin; but the most astounding of all was Lazarus.

It all began with Lazarus' two sisters, Mary and Martha. They sent word to Jesus saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill" (John 11:3). What a

marvelous lesson this is in prayer! The first thing they did when trouble came to them was to inform Jesus. They wanted Him to know about it. How many people through the centuries have found peace, comfort, and strength when, as they became frightened and burdened, they instinctively reached through the darkness to feel for the hand of Christ. We know that He cares and responds to our requests as He did for Mary and Martha.

When Jesus arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had already been dead for four days. Hearing of His arrival, Martha ran out to meet Him. Although she had some confidence in the power of Christ, it was still a very limited one as we see from her words, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Jesus responded, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said, "Yes, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

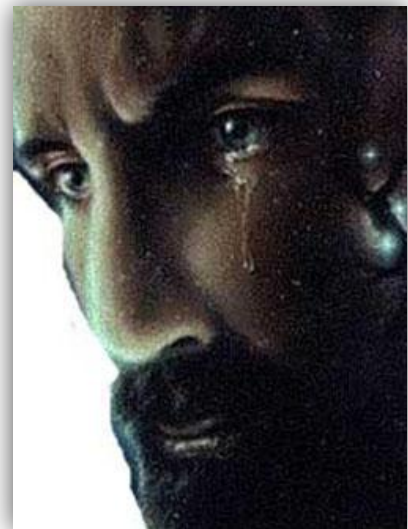
The faith that Martha expressed in the resurrection was that of most of the Jews. As the Samaritan woman at the well knew that the Messiah would come, but did not realize that He had already come and was standing right there before her, so Martha, though believing in the resurrection, did not know that the Resurrection was standing right there before her. As Jesus told the woman at the well that He was the Messiah, so now He said to Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."

"Deeply Moved in Spirit."

Next we read, "When Jesus saw Mary weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled" (John 11: 33). In these words, "*deeply moved in spirit and troubled*," we see Jesus' attitude toward death. He treats death not as a sometimes pleasant release from pain and despair. He treats it as an enemy, as a product of evil, as our last and greatest foe. He shows us that death is not to be accepted as much as it is to be overcome. If Christ is Life, then death is an enemy to be destroyed. Jesus, "deeply moved in spirit and troubled," as He stood before the tomb of Lazarus, shows us that death is abnormal, and, therefore, truly horrible. The Son of God is deeply moved and troubled by death — so moved that He submitted Himself to the same suffering and death to overcome this enemy with His power and give us the fruits of His victory.

"Jesus Wept."

"Where have you laid him?" asked Jesus. They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Then we come to the shortest but most moving verse in Scripture, "Jesus wept." Jesus is so moved by the death of His friend that He bursts into tears. Three times Jesus is described as weeping in the Scriptures. Once over a nation, when He wept over the sins of the world; and, in this instance over Lazarus, when He wept for the effect of sin, which is death. None of these tears were for Himself, but for the human nature He had assumed. He wept for sin and what it had done to man. He wept to show His concern for all those who lose loved ones. He wept to show us that we, too, should weep with those who weep. To express our grief through tears is not unmanly or unchristian: the Son of God Himself wept. But these are more than just tears of sympathy. When He Who is Life weeps at the grave of a friend, it is then that victory over death begins.



The place where Lazarus was buried was a tomb with a stone before it. "Take away the stone," said Jesus. Martha replied, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." One early French painting in the Louvre, on the Raising of Lazarus, shows one of the bystanders holding his nose.

Martha tried to warn Jesus that the condition of Lazarus was now such that all hope of his resurrection should be abandoned until the last day. Yet, in spite of this, in obedience to our Lord's command, the stone was taken away. Then Jesus addressed a beautiful prayer to His Heavenly Father, expressing His desire that everyone who saw this miracle might believe that He and the Father were One, and that the Father had sent Him into the world.

"Lazarus, Come Out!"

Then Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him and let him go." The same voice which in the beginning said, "Let there be light, and there was light" — that same voice now says, "Lazarus, come out," and Lazarus, dead four days, comes walking out of the tomb. "My Lord and my God!" Who can now doubt that "In Jesus is life"? Who can now doubt that on the last day that very same voice shall speak again "when the trumpet sounds" and "those who are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth"? Who can now doubt the words we confess in the Nicene Creed every Sunday: "I believe ... in the resurrection of the dead and in the life of the world to come"? "By raising Lazarus from the dead," says the troparion of the day, "Christ confirmed the truth of the general resurrection."

"Do you really believe Jesus called Lazarus from the dead?" someone was asked. He answered, "I never knew Lazarus, but I know what Jesus did for me. I understand Lazarus had been dead only four days. I had been dead four years and was in a bad state of decomposition. I had gone to pieces — I was both down and out. My family had gone to pieces. My business had gone to pieces. One by one my friendships had gone to pieces. Then Jesus spoke to me, and I became alive again. Now my family have come back. My friends recognize me. All things are made new. I do not know much about Lazarus, but one thing I do know — Jesus called me out of death into a new life."

Even today He calls, "Lazarus, come out." Those who hear His voice come walking out of real graves to a new life.

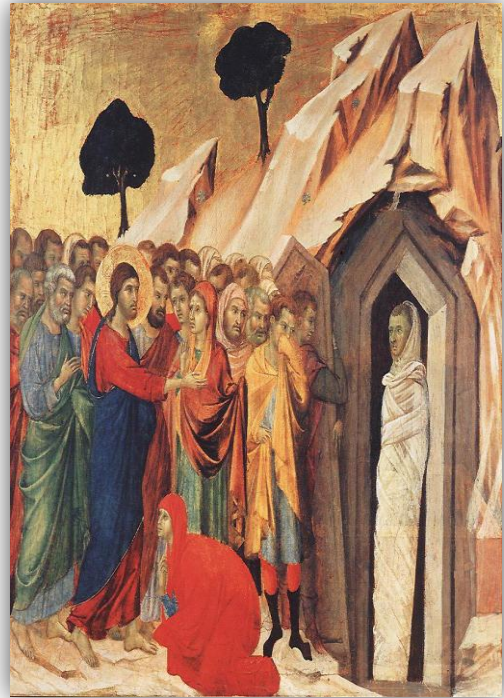
An agnostic, trying to ridicule the raising of Lazarus from the dead, asked an audience, "Can anyone tell me why Jesus said, 'Lazarus, come forth'?"

An elderly man stood and said, "Sir, I can tell you! If my Lord had not said, 'Lazarus, come forth,' every grave in that Bethany cemetery would have been emptied!"

What a happy reunion there was when Lazarus was restored to his sisters, Mary and Martha. What is this but a foretaste of what will happen on the last day when we shall be reunited not only with our Precious Lord, but also with all our departed loved ones to be with them forever: parents with children, brothers with brothers, friends with friends.

Who Is Lazarus?

We ask: who is that man in the tomb called Lazarus? whom Jesus loves? for whom He weeps? to whom He speaks? Could I be that man? Could I be Lazarus? Could this story of resurrection be my story? Of course, did not Jesus call me His friend? "I have not called you servants but friends ..." Was not I created for friendship with God: to know Him, love Him, serve Him, and be forever with Him? Did He not come to resurrect me not only from the final grave but also from the many graves in which I bury myself today?



After Lazarus came walking out of the tomb in the full glare of a noonday sun, one would have thought that everyone would have believed. But miracles are no cure for unbelief. Some will not believe even though one were to rise from the dead. It was the resurrection of Lazarus that brought out the crowds on Palm Sunday, but it was also Lazarus' resurrection that built the cross; for as the Apostle John writes, "From that day on they plotted his death."

The decision is made. Caiaphas, the high priest, unconsciously affirms that Jesus would die for all the people. The high priest in ancient times was believed to have the power of prophecy, and the Gospel testifies that Caiaphas' statement was true prophecy when he said:

"...it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish. He did not say this on his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (John 11:49-52).

Thus, toward the end of his life, Caiaphas, the high priest, who did not believe in the resurrection affirmed what an angel had announced at the Birth of Him Whose name was Jesus, namely that:

"He will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

The raising of Lazarus was a promise of more to come. It foreshadowed another and a greater miracle, Christ's own victory over the tomb. With Lazarus' resurrection "death begins to tremble." This is why a spirit of great joy pervades the liturgy on the Saturday of Lazarus. In the early church Lazarus Saturday was considered a pre-announcement of Easter. It signified the beginning of the end of death.

The two resurrections (Lazarus and Jesus) are brought together intimately through Mary. It was her love for Christ for raising Lazarus that led her to do a beautiful thing which is read in the Gospel lesson on Palm Sunday. Immediately after the resurrection of Lazarus, "a supper was given in his (Jesus') honour, at which Martha, served, and Lazarus sat among the guests with Jesus. Then Mary brought a pound of very costly perfume, ... and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped them with her hair, till the house was filled with the fragrance." When Judas objected, Jesus said, "... she prepares for my burial..."

The great duel between Light and Darkness takes place during Holy Week. But it takes place between two brilliant shafts of light: on the one end, "Lazarus, come out"; on the other end, "He is risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid Him!"

Adapted From A Coniaris