

Homily; 5th Sunday of Lent; Cycle “A”

The Gospels over the last three (3) weeks, are meant “*to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful*” in the hearts of the Elect while at the same time “*strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good.*” Two (2) weeks ago, you recall the story of the “*Woman at the Well,*” followed by the “*Man born Blind*” and today the “*Raising of Lazarus.*” Note the movement in these Gospels from thirst to blindness to death. Each Gospel is an image of a type of spiritual weakness. *We’re thirsty*; and nothing the world has to offer can satisfy us. *We’re blind*; and no worldly intervention allows us to see. *We’re dead*; and we can’t bring ourselves back to life.

Acknowledging that we’re powerless; that we’re nothing without God – is an important 1st step – because in our society we place such a premium on our own self-worth, to control our own destiny. But those thoughts are contrary to Christian thought – which is predicated upon *our need* for a Savior, and that Savior is Jesus Christ, God who became Man to *heal* all that is weak, defective and sinful within us.

There are three (3) different Gospel stories of people being raised from the dead:

- The 1st is the daughter of Jarius...you may recall this story, where Jesus says to the girl who died, “*Little girl, get up*” and she does.
- The 2nd is the son of the widow of Naim, the story of the woman who lost her grown but still young son. As the widow’s son was being carried to his tomb in a coffin, Jesus says, “*Young man, I tell you, arise!*” and the dead man sits up and begins to speak.
- The 3rd is today’s story of Lazarus.

Each of these Gospel stories, according to St. Augustine, symbolizes different levels of *our* sinful nature.

- He says, think of the little girl, still young and innocent, living at home...this is a symbol of the initial infiltration of that tendency to sin within us.
- The young man, son of the widow, was out on his own, earning a wage, living in ‘the world.’ He represents a more serious type of sin...perhaps the type of sin that we most suffer from...that longing for wealth, pleasure, power and honor, all of which can get in the way of our relationship with God.
- Then, there’s Lazarus, a grown man – four (4) days in the tomb. He represents someone absorbed in sin. On a spiritual level, he’s totally dead.

According to St. Augustine, Jesus relates to each of these three (3) figures in different ways – but let’s focus on how He dealt with Lazarus; someone dead for so long there was concern about the stench of decay. We see that Jesus goes to the tomb and sees Martha, Mary and the other mourners weeping. He is deeply troubled. And the Word who became flesh, knew what it was like to lose a friend. And He suffered, just like you and I suffer, at the loss of a loved one...*and He began to Weep.*

Keep that image of Jesus *weeping at the tomb* in mind. Because if we do, it will change the way we look at sin; and our relationship with Jesus will never be the same. The Gospel tells us, Jesus weeps over the loss of His friend; St. Augustine tells us *this* is God weeping because of *our* sins. And, what is sin if it’s not the loss of friendship with God? The scriptural connection between death and sin is unmistakable. And when God suffers the loss of a friend, the pain He grieves because of that loss – *brings Him to tears.* So, next time we think we can be light hearted

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or casual about sin, the next time we think...it doesn't really matter, because everyone is doing it; recall what St. Augustine said ... it was our very own sins that brought Jesus to ***weep at the tomb***.

Again, from St. Augustine...Jesus says to Martha & Mary, “***Where have you laid him?***” This question shows God’s never ending search for His friends, no matter how dead to sin we may be.

Think back to the Book of Genesis ... recall when Adam & Eve sinned – their response was one of shame, so they hid from God. Before they sinned, they were in friendship with Him. After they’ve sinned, they hide, they’re ashamed, they flee from God ... but, just like He does for Lazarus, God goes looking for them, and that is what He does for us, He comes looking for us...when we hide or wander away.

When Jesus arrives at the tomb, He cries out in a loud voice, “***Lazarus, come out!***” For me, I am more comfortable thinking of our Lord in conversation with His Disciples or teaching the crowds – but ***here*** He cries out in a loud and authoritative voice, “***Lazarus, come out!***” and ‘***Because He is who He says He is, what He says, is!***’ Let me repeat that... ‘***Because He is who He says He is, what He says, is!***’ But what does that mean?

It means this...His voice is not the voice of an ordinary teacher or preacher, This voice is the voice that said, at the very beginning of time, “***Let there be light!***” and there was light!

St. Thomas Aquinas says, ***God speaks things into being!*** For us, we see the world as it is and we speak about it...our words are ***descriptive***. But God’s words are not just descriptive...His words are ***creative***. It’s not that things exist and God describes them...No, ***God speaks ... and they come to be!*** This is why when God says in a loud voice, “***Lazarus, come out!***” the Gospel tells us, the dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands and his face wrapped in a cloth.

This is also why the words of Jesus, spoken through the priest at Mass affect the Eucharistic change. The voice that said, “***Lazarus, come out!***” is the same voice that said, “***Little girl, get up!***” It is the same voice that said, “***Young man, I tell you, arise!***” and it is the same voice that says, “***This is my Body!***”... “***This is my Blood!***” ***Because He is who He says He is, what Jesus says, is!***”

So, what does all of this means to us??? To some degree, each of us is spiritually dead. Maybe we are like the daughter of Jarius ... where sin is at our surface, but hasn't taken deep root? Maybe we are like the son of the widow ... where sin is a bit further advanced? Maybe we are more like Lazarus ... four (4) days in the tomb, totally dead to sin and we feel there's no hope? But, here's the point. It doesn't matter who we are, it doesn't matter how far we've fallen; the voice of Jesus ***can*** call us back to life. The voice of Jesus ***can*** get us to walk out of the tomb.

And once Lazarus is out of the tomb, Jesus says, “***Untie him and let him go.***” For, you see, God does not want us to be bound by our weaknesses, defects or sins, He hates all the ways we have managed to tie ourselves up in sin and the way we wander without direction into these tombs.

St. Ireneus tells us, “***The Glory of God is Man Fully Alive!***” So, when Jesus said; ***Untie him, let him go!***” He is speaking of the hold sin has over each one of us. And it doesn't matter if our fallen nature is better represented by the little girl, the son of the widow or Lazarus himself. When Jesus cries out in a loud voice, “***Lazarus, come out!***” He is speaking to each one of us, just

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as He is when He speaks to our weaknesses, defects and sinfulness and says, “*Untie him and let him go!*”