

## The Fifth Sunday in Lent – 29<sup>th</sup> March 2020 – The Gospel of St. John Chapter 11 v 3 – 45

We know, from other passages in the Gospels, that Jesus had a particular affection for this little family in Bethany – of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Bethany is only about six miles from Jerusalem and Jesus would often stay at Bethany on His visits to the Holy City.

As we know from St. Luke's Gospel, on a previous occasion Jesus had visited them and whilst Martha was busy in the kitchen, Mary had sat at the feet of Jesus to listen to His teaching. On this occasion however, things are different. It is Martha who runs to be with Jesus and it is Mary who holds back.

There are some deep undercurrents of emotion going on in this passage. Lazarus was alive when Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus. They are – presumably – confident that Jesus will come and heal Lazarus. They remind Jesus of His affection for them – “Lord, he whom You love - he whom You love – is ill”. But Jesus delays, and when ( eventually ) He arrives in Bethany Lazarus has already been dead for four days. And Martha is not slow to express her feelings on the matter – “Lord, if You had been here my brother would not have died”. Perhaps Mary, staying in the house, cannot hide her disappointment that Jesus ( as it were ) has arrived too late. Of course we know that Jesus has reserved for this little family ( and for His dear friend Lazarus ) one of the great signs and miracles of His Ministry.

And we should not forget the time scale here. This is the last event in the life of Jesus (as recorded by St. John ) before the events of Holy Week and Easter. In other words, the raising of Lazarus precedes His own Resurrection from the dead by about two weeks. And so we should not overlook how important this sign is to Jesus Himself. Of all the miracles of Jesus this is the miracle which must surely have had the most profound significance for Jesus Himself. For if God – if He Himself can raise a man from the dead after *four* (!) days then surely – for Jesus – this is the most powerful testimony ( and affirmation ) that He too will indeed be raised from the dead. As Jesus faced agony and suffering and death, what a strengthening of His own vocation – and of His belief ( and teaching ) that He will be raised “on the *third* day”, and that He did indeed have the power to lay down His life and to take it up again.

Of course when Lazarus was raised, he was raised to the same life. He was raised from the dead – but he would die again. I wonder when and where and how he died a second time? But when Jesus was raised, He was raised never to die again! He was raised not to the same life but to a glorified and exalted existence. It was the same Body – but that Body was now glorified – “I am He that died! – and behold! – I am alive forevermore!”. That Resurrection power Jesus now wants to release in to our own lives. Indeed, that power was first unleashed in our baptism. St. Peter speaks of this when he says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ – by His great mercy - we have been born again – to a living hope – ( how? ) – through the Resurrection of Christ from the dead”. And yet many of us ( and I include myself ) we suffocate this new life within us. Instead of surrendering ourselves to the life of Christ, already at work within us, we resist the promptings of the Holy Spirit because we want to do our own thing. And so we imprison ourselves – and become slaves to our chains – and all the time Jesus is calling us to freedom. He wants to break out of the tombs we have created for ourselves to live in and set us free. Whatever “tomb” we are trapped in today – Jesus wants to release us So let us give Jesus permission to roll away the stone that is trapping us in our self-made tombs.

“ Lord Jesus, I come to You today in all my weakness and fear and imperfection. I am not what I should be. I'm not what I could be, or what You call me to be, in Your Son Jesus Christ. I have fallen away, fallen back, from that closer relationship with You which is my deepest desire. I ask You to break out from the depths of my being, to flood me with, and to transform me by, Your Resurrection power. Raise me from the dead! Save me through the merits of Your Precious Blood. Amen. Amen. Amen.”