

Connecting With the Sunday Readings

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Death interrupts everything! The death of grandparents, parents, or children, often serves as a major turning point in the lives of remaining family members. It is very appropriate that the greatest miracle of Jesus, aside from his own Resurrection, is the raising back to life of Lazarus, his dear friend. Conquering death, destroying its firm grasp on us, is a basic human longing and hope. But is this a false hope? No one escapes this question.

Nothing causes more fear in us than the anticipated thought of our own death. Granted, we can make peace with our mortality, but still, deep within, there is fear. What's to become of me after I die? What will it be like once I make that final journey? Will it be the absolute end of my existence? Will there be light at the end of a tunnel, as some have reported? Will I meet Saint Peter? There is no doubt that the reality of death is what most disturbs us, if we are not in denial. It directly connects us with the most basic content of our Christian faith. As Christians, we believe that God's power and love conquers death. Like Christ, like Lazarus, we too will be raised from the dead. That's the center of our faith and the substance of our hope.

A Gospel Word for the Home

John 11:1–45

The rising of Lazarus is one of the longest narratives in the Gospel. But none of it is extra or unnecessary. Every word counts. Every verse is important. A careful reading of this part of John's Gospel will yield so much more than simply hearing it once at Mass. While reflecting on this Gospel, keep in mind that it's about God creating life and remaining with life, our lives, all the time. Jesus died so that we may live. Lazarus died so that Jesus could show in very dramatic fashion that God is a God of the living, now and forever. Even in the midst of the many small deaths we experience during our lives, God wants us to live abundantly, as is said in another part of John's Gospel.

When God loves, it is always in a personal love. One sign that personal love is present is when we experience grief at the loss of someone we cherish. Jesus weeps over the death of Lazarus. But it's not just Lazarus that Jesus loves. Nor is his love only for Mary and Martha. His love is for all of us. No greater love is shown than when someone lays down their life for another which Jesus is about to do for all of us (see John 15:3).

Parent Survival

The essence of parenting is to give and support the life of others, primarily our children. Life is given to us by God so that we can pass it on to others. Life is more like a flowing stream than a stagnant lake. So much of what makes life worth living is the passing on of life to those who follow us. Of course, there are aspects of contemporary culture which fail to appreciate this process of sharing life.

A bumper sticker was seen on an expensive car that read, "Nice car. I'm spending your inheritance." The point was obvious: what's mine is mine and not yours. This is about as counter-Gospel as one can imagine. Life and love are intimately connected. The story of Lazarus is as much a love story as is any other part of the Bible. The humanity of Jesus and his close friendship with Martha, Mary and Lazarus are apparent. Jesus cries at the tomb of Lazarus. He loved Lazarus and so he brought him back to life. This is richly symbolic. Jesus will bring us all back to life eventually. Knowing this can make all the difference in the world if you are a parent.

Car or Meal Talk

Ask children to talk with you about what they think about the story of Jesus, Lazarus, Martha and Mary.

-by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

One-Line Prayer

Jesus, thank you for your life-giving love. Amen.