

HOMILY ~ FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT MARCH 25/26, 2023

There were three friends that were talking about what they would like to be remembered for after they die. One of them asked: *“What would you like people to be saying as they walk by your casket at the viewing?”* One of them said I would like them to be saying: *“She was a great physician. She helped a lot of people.”* A second one said I would like them to be saying: *“He was a great teacher and mentor. He really changed the lives of many of his students.”* The third said as people are walking by the casket he would like to hear them say: *“Look, he is moving. This is the greatest miracle since Lazarus!”* We all know intellectually that we are going to die, but there is a part of us that hopes this is not true or that it will not happen for a long time. We also do not like to think about the death of people that we love. If we really believe what we say we believe, that we are destined to be with God and our loved ones for all eternity, why do we have such a hard time accepting death?

In the Gospel Reading, we hear how Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Now Mary and Martha believed that Jesus is the Christ, he is God. They also believed that Jesus could have cured Lazarus. *“If you would have been here, my brother would not have died.”* They also believed that Lazarus would rise in the resurrection on the last day. They believed all of this, but they were still grieving the loss of their brother. We experience the death of people we love in a very painful way because we have to go on living without them, and it is painful. We must grieve the loss of the people that we love. We have to have the rituals of a wake and a funeral and a funeral lunch if we can. The importance of this became very clear in the early days of COVID when we could not do funerals or the funeral had to be limited to a very small number of people. Even if we really believe what we say we believe, that we are destined to be with God and our loved ones for all eternity, as human beings we still have to go through that grieving process. I have heard people say that they do not want the funeral and all of that when they die. They do not want people to go to all of that expense or bother; however, it is very important to the

grieving process of the people who love you. If you are grieving, it will take time; and you need to reach out to people that will walk this journey with you. Do not try to do it alone. You need to keep telling your story until you do not need to tell it anymore. You need to find your new normal. You may want to join us for *Grief Share*. It will help you.

We also heard in the Gospel that Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus. Jesus knew that he was going to resuscitate Lazarus. He purposely waited to go to Bethany until Lazarus was dead four days. Jesus was not weeping over the loss of Lazarus. He was weeping because he empathized with Mary and Martha and all of the people that were grieving over the loss of Lazarus. People sometimes ask me where was God when my loved one died? God was grieving with you. Jesus actually gave up his life to raise Lazarus from the dead. This was kind of the last straw for the people that wanted to get rid of Jesus. After this miracle, they knew that they were going to crucify Jesus.

Even though we believe what our faith tells us, we still see death as something very negative because it is painful to cope with the loss of someone we love. We will experience our own death in a much different way. Our own death will not be painful. It will be our transition to eternal life where we will be fully united with God. In that sense, death is not a negative thing at all. It is what we need to do to be with God. Maybe that will help us to accept the reality of death, not in a morbid way, but in a way that will help us to prepare for death. Maybe we should be living more in the moment. Someday I will attend Mass regularly. Someday I will volunteer at Church. Someday I will pray regularly. Maybe when the kids are grown. Maybe when I retire. Someday I will be able to forgive. Someday I will try and reconcile with some of my family members. Maybe someday, someday, someday ... should be today.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim