

5th Sunday in Lent + 22 March 2026 + Ezek 37:12-14 + Rom 8:8-11 + Jn 11:1-45

Today, we come to the 3rd and final scrutiny as we prepare for Easter. So far, we have examined 2 lengthy Gospels from John, where Jesus makes an important revelation about Himself: that He is living water, that He is the light of the world, and now today, that He is the *resurrection and the life*. In the chronology of St. John, today's Gospel marks the end of Jesus' ministry, just before He begins His passion. And so it is no surprise that Jesus performs what might be called His crowning miracle: He raises a dead man to life. It would seem like there could be no greater miracle than this. And yet there is an even greater miracle to occur, as we shall see.

To begin, we hear of the illness of Lazarus, a friend of Jesus from Bethany, which is a village just to the east of Jerusalem. And Jesus makes a curious comment that should jog our memories of last week's Gospel of the man born blind. That is, just as Jesus said that the man was blind *not* on account of his sins, but *so that the works of God might be made visible through him*, so today He says that Lazarus' *illness is for the glory of God*. And this is very important: the crosses that we carry, even in our bodies, are not for nothing. They can serve the most important of all human activities; they can serve the glory of God, *if*—and this is a big *if*—we have faith. Last week, we heard the testimony of the man whose blindness was healed because of his faith. Today, we witness the power of even not-yet-perfect faith!

Now, all of this explains why Jesus waited 2 whole days upon hearing of the illness of Lazarus, before going to visit him. This waiting period was *not* because Jesus was afraid to go back to Judea, even though, as the disciples point out, the people there wanted to kill Him. Rather, Jesus was specifically *waiting* for Lazarus to die, in order to glorify God. But what does that mean? How in the world can God be glorified in human death? Is Jesus talking crazy here? These are very important questions, because so often people fall away from the faith when they encounter some cross, and they pray so hard, but it doesn't go away. What is God doing here? Doesn't He care? Well yes, He certainly *does* care, as we shall see.

Moving on, as Jesus is approaching Bethany, Lazarus' sister Martha goes to intercept Him. She seems to be a little upset with Jesus' delay, and yet she also seems to hold on to some hope that Jesus can still do something. She believes, as some Jews did at that time, in a resurrection of the body at the end of time. But on account of her protest of Jesus' command to *take away the stone* covering the tomb, we can infer that she doesn't have hope beyond that final resurrection. And neither does her sister Mary, whose grief seems to overtake her faith. Mary believed that Jesus could have done something prior to Lazarus' death. But now, all hope is lost.

So, what is Jesus' response to all of this? Well, even though Martha and Mary's faith was incomplete, it was enough to elicit Jesus' crowning miracle. Jesus calls out to Lazarus, and he comes out of the tomb, every bit as alive as you or I! And as a result, we hear that *many of the Jews who had come to [see what Jesus] had done began to believe in him*. Now, notice here how Jesus also explains *why* He brought Lazarus back to life: He says to Martha, *did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?* In other words, the Father had a plan all along. He really did care! And His plan, which the Son was perfectly obedient to, was to reveal His glory: glory revealed in His power to even raise a dead man back to life, and glory revealed in hearts that are moved from grief and doubt to faith!

And that is so important, because we probably don't usually think of God's glory revealed when someone comes to believe that Jesus is *the Christ, the Son of God*. But this truth helps to explain the final revelation Jesus makes in our Gospel today. That is, His actions prove the truth of His words to Martha that *I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die*. How so? Well, in order to explain this, we need to understand the dual layers of meanings that Jesus gives to 'life and death' here.

Even though Lazarus was raised from the dead, he would die once again. We too will all die someday. Jesus isn't saying that we will never undergo human death if we believe. Notice how Jesus earlier referred to Lazarus' death as '*sleep*.' Because for God, human death isn't the unconquerable defeat that it is for us. After all, He has only to say the word, and we can regain life's breath. It's no more difficult than rousing someone from sleep! The worst 'death,' so to speak, is the death of the soul: is the death that leads to eternal separation from God. Think of the parable of the Prodigal Son. In this parable, the father, as an image of God the Father, says of the homecoming of his son—an image of sinful humanity: *we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again* (Lk 15:32).

Being separated from our Heavenly Father: that is the worst death, and that is the death that Jesus promises victory over, through faith. Those who believe in Jesus as the Son of God and receive Baptism into His own life and death, will receive the fulness of *life*. In this life: living waters in the Holy Spirit, and hearts & minds converted from darkness to light. And someday: a resurrected body and eternal life! All of this is the 'life' Jesus is promising here! And this is why this Gospel is so fitting for these final days before Holy Week. Unlike Lazarus, Jesus will rise from the dead, never to die again. And that is our hope too: that even though we will die in the flesh, we will someday live forever in Christ, in our own resurrected bodies in heaven. And so our final scrutiny today is simply this: Jesus asks us the same question He asked Martha so long ago: "do *you* believe this?"