

The Fifth Sunday of Lent
March 26, 2023
Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant

“It is a greater deed to create men than to raise them again from the dead. Yet he deigned both to create and to raise again; to create all, to resuscitate some.”
St. Augustine of Hippo from Tractates on the Gospel of John)

Jesus doesn't immediately go to Bethany, where Lazarus lives, because God has a plan in mind. Lazarus is sick and suffering because this plan must continue without Jesus intervening prematurely. It is a scenario that must be played out because they must be convinced of Christ's divinity and God's power.

Upon arriving in Bethany, the hometown of his friend Lazarus, Jesus finds his friend has been in his tomb for four days. There is little doubt that Lazarus is dead. When Jesus approaches the cave where his friend is entombed, the family is crying and Jesus weeps with them. This man who is also divine, who knows he has the power and authority to bring Lazarus back from death, openly weeps! Why does He cry? God's love explains why Jesus cried at his friend's tomb. Even though he had the power to raise Lazarus, He felt their pain and agony. St. John Henry Newman said it so succinctly, “Their tears touched him at once, as their miseries had brought him down from heaven. His ear was open to them, and the sound of weeping went at once to his heart.” It was love.

You who are adults, may have suffered great emotional pain due to a loved one, perhaps a dear friend, a parent, a child, falling ill or suffering gravely from injury. You suffered with them. You felt an internal pain for them. Your great love and affection may have brought you to tears. When you think of that instance in your life, you begin to understand why Jesus was crying for them and for each of us. How difficult it must have been for Christ to let His dear friend suffer and die. How punishing it must have been for Christ to watch the suffering of Mary and Martha. Christ was a man who was touched by their sufferings. His profound empathy led him to this very human response. And, this reflects that Christ was touched by the suffering of all mankind. Part of Christ's mission was to confront and overcome death caused by sin and all the suffering associated with sin.

I have to defer to something I read by Bishop Barron, who spoke of Christ's mission; “He is a cosmic warrior who has come to do battle with those forces that keep us from being fully alive.” The Bishop is talking about sin, the cause of death, which keeps us from living a full life. And, Bishop Barron further speaks to how Christ must personally deal with sin and death with his reference to Tolkien's book; “Like Frodo going into Mordor in The Lord of the Rings, Jesus has to go into death's domain, get into close quarters with it and take it on.”

Jesus raises Lazarus so that many could witness his power over death. And, near the end of his mission, He personally goes to face death and conquer it for us all, that we may be raised up to join with Him and God in Heaven. He became our savior, the bridge between heaven and earth, that we might have the choice to follow Him toward that eternal resting place. Why did Jesus do all this? Why did God plan all this? It's simple. ‘Love’ is the answer. To remove original sin and all the sin of our culture and life, He gave himself as the ultimate sacrifice. Mother Teresa advised us so well when she said, “Let nothing come between you and Jesus.” In other words, let nothing come between you and God's love. Peace be with you.