

Reflection for the 5th Sunday of Lent

This Sunday is the Fifth Sunday of Lent and the last Sunday of the Lenten Season before Passion Sunday, Palm Sunday and the start of Holy Week. As we find ourselves in this final week of Lent before we enter into the most holy and sacred week of the year, our Gospel reading this Sunday provides us with a four-fold message. This message is presented to us by Jesus, Martha, Mary and Lazarus.

In the Gospel reading this Sunday we hear that Lazarus of Bethany is ill, due to this illness Mary and Martha the sisters of Lazarus sent word to Jesus, *Master, the one you love is ill*. By the time that Jesus arrives in Bethany Lazarus had passed away and was already in the tomb for four days. At this point, when Jesus arrives in Bethany, we can see the Gospel reading providing us with a four-fold message.

It is mentioned not once but twice in our Gospel reading that when Jesus arrives in Bethany He is “perturbed”. The word perturbed is not commonly used in the Bible, in fact it is used just three times depending on the English translation, twice in the Gospel of John and once the Book of Proverbs. Noting that this word is rarely used in the Bible it might make sense to look into the etymology of the word perturbed. Looking at the history of the word its roots are found in the 14th century French word *perturber* and this word comes from the Latin word *perturbare* which is defined as a state of confusion. This is an understandable emotion and reaction when a person has lost a loved one. Even though Jesus knows he will raise Lazarus from the dead as the Son of God, as a member of humanity he is affected by the loss of His friend. Jesus is reminding us today that we can relate to Him for He is both human and divine. It is in His humanity that we can relate to the Son of God.

Mary is so filled with grief at the loss of Lazarus that even when she hears that Jesus has arrived in Bethany, she does not go out to meet Him, she just stays at home. Mary was the one that sat at the feet of Jesus to listen to His words, for she was so filled with faith. When a challenging moment disturbs her life, she struggles with her faith and embraces despair. With the despair of Mary in our Gospel reading we are reminded that in times of struggle we need to trust in God even more than normal.

Martha has grief that has turned to anger so when she hears that Jesus has arrived in Bethany, she goes out to meet Him and says *Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died*. We then hear of the conversation that Jesus has with Martha that ends with her saying, *Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world*. From this challenging time of the loss of Lazarus, Martha grows in her faith to the point that she knows who Jesus is and her life is forever changed. In a challenging time, Martha is open to expressing her feelings and thoughts. It is through this openness that Martha, with the grace of God grows in her faith, so it can be the same for you and I.

The last part of the four-fold message of this Gospel reading is that Lazarus is risen from the dead by Jesus. This rising from the dead is a foreshadowing of what is to come. This miracle also shows the power of Jesus Christ. He has power over life and death, and he chooses to bring Lazarus back from the dead even after four days in the tomb. The reason why the Gospel mentions that Lazarus had been in the tomb four days is to show that there was no hope that he could be raised from the dead for the Prophet Jonah had only been in the belly of the fish for three days and nights. Lazarus is reminding us that all things are possible with God for those who believe.

In closing, as we prepare to enter into the most holy and sacred time of the year, Holy Week, may we open our hearts to God, and trust in Him. Jesus, Mary, Martha and Lazarus today on this 5th Sunday of Lent remind us of the fact that our loving God is active in the world and in our lives. This coming Holy Week is an opportunity for all of us to be reminded of the love that God has for us. It is because of a loving God that each of us can overcome what is preventing us from fully being the follower that God and created us to be.