

5th Sunday of Lent year A

John 11:1-45

We rapidly approach Holy Week and Easter
And we are given to explore *another encounter* of Jesus.
Recall last week's encounter with the blind man.
This encounter, however, is with someone Jesus already knows: *Lazarus*.
It is interesting.
Apparently, the Church has discerned that the best way
to prepare us to celebrate Easter is to explore encounters...
Easter is an *encounter* with the Risen Christ.

Each of these encounters is about resurrection.
The Resurrection of Christ is His definitive victory over death.
The love that causes Christ to rise from the dead is already in His heart,
and so He can share that love
with whomever He encounters before even dying and rising.
Here he shares it with Lazarus.
In this encounter, as with that with the blind man,
Jesus says that the illness is for the glory of God.
In other words, God will make use of the illness for His love
– the love that causes Jesus to rise – somehow to overflow.

Jesus arrives in Bethany.
He is “sent word” by Mary and Martha that Lazarus is ill.
Jesus declares that Lazarus will not die.
And then He responds very strangely.
He stays on the outskirts of town.
Try to understand that response!
“Hello! He is dying; not a time for a vacation.”
Any true friend rushes to his ill friend's (“the one you love”) bedside.
How is Jesus reasoning?
“Oh my, that is really too bad. Well, we'll go to the pub and have a beer in his honor.”
In fact, after two days, Jesus says,
“Let us go back to Judea.”
Jesus does not want to go?
Who knows, at this point, Matthew might have whispered,
“James, Jesus is losing it”.

In the ensuing dialogue about where to go,
Jesus declares that Lazarus is asleep.
The disciples do not understand, but Jesus is saying that he is dead
(contradicting what he had previously declared).
Jesus was so slow to get his act together that his friend died in the meantime.

This is a very strange revelation of Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life.
The disciples were surely rather lost.
Jesus then declares that he was glad that he was not there at Lazarus' side when he died.
It is seemingly callous, and terribly out of character.
Why is Jesus doing this?

Jesus says that he has proceeded thus so that the disciples may believe.
It is not very clear what he means,
such that Thomas declares, "Let us go to die with him." (verse 16) What?!?!?

When he finally arrives, Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days!
Pepe le Puh!
He has a *lot* of explaining and consoling to do with Mary and Martha.

Martha runs to meet him.
She expresses her grief.
Jesus does no explaining.
Jesus wants simply to reveal Himself,
a revelation in which there is the greatest comfort...
Martha knew Jesus, but not as fully divine.
She knew him as someone close to and favoured by God.
"I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." (verse 22)
Martha expresses her belief:
"I know he will rise, in the resurrection, in the last day." (verse 24)
Jesus takes hold of her faith and makes a most incredible revelation:
"I *am* the Resurrection and the Life." (verse 25)

Notice how cautiously she responds...
She does not fully understand.
We do not fully understand – after hearing for so long and praying for so long...

Jesus gives us eternal life, which is *His* life.
Such is the life about which Jesus is speaking.
It is *another* life – which death, which we will all experience – can and does not stop.

In giving us such life, Jesus gives us His love.
Hence the sensitivity of Jesus that follows in this encounter.
Jesus encounters Mary, and is drawn into the great sadness of everyone.
Jesus almighty then cries, because love predominates in Him.
It is more than simple emotional response.
Jesus *chooses to cry* (which does not make it artificial or forced).
Jesus cries so that His love might reach us in our sadness.

And, from His heart overflowing with love both human and divine,
Jesus performs a miracle: He raises Lazarus.

“Lazarus, come out!” (verse 43)

His death “is for the glory of God” (verse 4).

Glory is the overflow of divine love.

Love raises Lazarus, and in being raised, love is made manifest.

Jesus asks us,

- “Do you believe this?”
- “Do you really believe that I am the Resurrection and the Life?”
- “Do you believe that my love can reach you in death
and raise you from the dead?”
- Do you believe that my love can reach you in the many ways
in which daily you feel like you are dying?”

Believe it, and “you will see the glory of God” (verse 40).

We must humbly acknowledge our difficulty in believing.

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us: “Lord, help my unbelief”,
and certitude will arise in our hearts.

We will rise...