

5th Sunday of Lent “Lazarus”
Bishop Frank Schuster

My friends, here is a little recap. We began the pilgrimage of Lent by following our Lord into the desert for forty days and forty nights to fast and pray. On the second Sunday, we followed Jesus up mount Tabor for the transfiguration and invited to look at the areas of our lives that need transformation. On the third Sunday of Lent, we travelled with Jesus to Samaria where we met the woman at the well. We thirsted with her for the life-giving waters of baptism. Last week, Jesus introduced us to the man born blind. We were invited to gain spiritual sight that comes from faith. This week, this fifth Sunday of Lent, we follow Jesus to the tomb of Lazarus. Jesus gives us his most powerful “I am” statement in the Gospel when he says, “I am the resurrection and the life”. We are amazed to learn that Jesus has power over death itself.

My friends, Ezekiel says it, doesn't he? Thus says the Lord God: O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them! Bishop Barron likes to quote Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, “the Glory of God is a human being fully alive”. Let's hear that again, the Glory of God is a human being fully alive. What does that mean? It means that God is happy when we are the most fully alive we can be. Furthermore, it also means the opposite, God is unhappy when we are not fully alive.

When Jesus comes to us in the fullness of time, he comes as a healer, he comes to raise people from the dead, physically indeed but also spiritually. The resuscitation of Lazarus is a powerful Gospel reading that carries that message further. Of course, this wasn't the only time Jesus resuscitated someone from death in the Gospels. Jesus rose three people from the dead in his ministry, Jairus' daughter, the widow of Nain's son, and Lazarus.

St. Augustine had some very interesting things to say about the three miracle stories recalling Jesus raising people from the dead. St. Augustine wants us to notice that Jairus' daughter died in the house! He is interested that the death occurred in the house. The house represents the soul for St. Augustine. The daughter's death represents the death inside us due to sin that has affected only our inner selves. Jesus wants to raise us up from even that little kind of spiritual death.

Notice that the widow of Nain's son is carried outside of the house after he died. For Augustine, this kind of death represents the sin within us that not only affects the inside of our souls but also our outer person. This spiritual death has made an effect on the person we are. Jesus wants to raise us up from that kind of death.

And now we have the story of Lazarus. Lazarus is not only outside of the house, but he is in the tomb. Indeed, when Jesus commands them to “roll away the stone”, Martha cautions Jesus, “Lord, by now there will be a stench, he has been dead for four days”. St. Augustine remarks that the spiritual death described by Lazarus' death is the sin that has not only affected the inner soul. Indeed, this spiritual death has not only

affected the outer soul. The spiritual death of Lazarus represents the sinfulness that makes our lives stink to other people around us, it has affected our relationships, and has killed the person God intended us to be.

Look at Jesus when he learns the fate of his friend Lazarus. It says Jesus wept. Now this is God. God is weeping for Lazarus. Furthermore, it says Jesus groaned. God is groaning because God hates death. Like St. Irenaeus, the glory of God is a human being fully alive. And so, Jesus commands us to roll away the stone.

My friends, let's ask ourselves: what are the areas in our lives that feel like a corpse right now? What are the areas in our spirit life that is tied up, unable to move like a body confined to a coffin? Life can feel like that sometimes. Let's ask ourselves: what is the stone that is blocking us from resurrection and new life. What is the boulder that is blocking us from a deeper relationship with God. And Jesus says, roll away the stone.

Next week is Palm Sunday! Prepare the way for the Lord!