



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today, this Fifth Sunday of Lent, is traditionally called Lazarus Sunday. We hear the wondrous story of the Raising of Lazarus from the Dead. It was not resurrection, for Lazarus would die again. It was a return, a restoration if you will, to the life he had been living. The difference for the life he had been living? He returned to it with two profound understandings.

First, he came back to this life, his and ours, having beheld all the dead awaiting the gracious and eternal effect of Christ's Resurrection. He entered the realm of the dead, and he beheld all those bound by death. In the iconic tradition of the East, Lazarus is never depicted with anything but a solemn face. For he had come face to face with the ultimate brokenness, and in this life, that brokenness is still real. There is no facile, easy, smiling depiction of Lazarus.

Second, as he came forth from the tomb, the first – in truth, the only reality – standing in front of him was Jesus Christ, who had moments before revealed himself to Martha and Mary as The Resurrection and The Life. I often imagine the confusion for Lazarus, not quite knowing what side of the grave he was on. He returned to this broken life, illuminated by the Resurrection.

That's where we are, brothers and sisters. Each and every day of our lives of faith; more pointedly in this time of the Covid-19 Pandemic. The world is broken. The Resurrection is our light "in hac lacrimarum valle – in this

vale of tears” as the Salve Regina prayer says. It is this tension of “already, but not yet.” We are sojourners with a foot in both realities.

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We are continually called back to this world in which we had been living, but to return inspired by the Resurrection. What do we bring with us, having passed through these days and weeks and months of Covid-19 (with more certainly to come), to our daily living now? Six thoughts:

First, Lazarus’ own solidarity with all those in the throes of death: those who have died in the pandemic, those who will die, those who are greatly afflicted, those who care for them, those charged with the common good striving to provide – not a facile “let’s get back to work” answer – but a continued vigilance premised on the value of each and every human life, and every reasonable precaution that vigilance demands of us.

Second, an awareness that we have been through this before. I don’t mean this particular pandemic happening to us here and now, but the witness and the testimony of that great “cloud of witnesses” that has come before us. You know, in the Communion of Saints of which we are a part, countless numbers of the Faithful have known war and famine and pestilence and disease and crushing poverty. What was their response? A living faith in Our Lord. A taking up of their crosses, following Him daily, with trust in the Resurrection in which they now rejoice. Their witness? Our present moment doesn’t define us. Christ defines us.

Third, in the words of the homily given at the Grotto of the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth on the very Feast of the Annunciation: “before this we thought ourselves powerful, now we feel powerless; before we trusted only in ourselves, now nothing can be trusted...except the Lord.” It is an opportunity for a complete reordering of life. A life now lived in a true humility that enables us to receive – with arms outstretched as if on the Cross, with hands uplifted as in holy prayer - the gift we cannot take or make for ourselves. The gift? Resurrection, now and eternally.

Fourth, a renewed appreciation for the common good, and an appreciation that such a good doesn’t just happen. It comes through vigilance, selflessness, sacrifice. Through works of justice and mercy, love and peace, we shine the light of the Resurrection in this broken world of ours. It is no false selfishness that asserts one would rather die than destroy the economy, for we are not an aggregate of autonomous individuals. We are in this together, and my bravado comes to stop before it risks harming a single other sacred human life. That’s it: a common good upholding the dignity and the rights of everyone, especially the most vulnerable, from the moment of conception to natural death.

Fifth, a simpler living. I have been struck by the number of walkers in our neighborhoods. I’ve even observed parents walking with their adolescent children. And enjoying the walk and each other. Could it be that with less feverish busy-ness, with a release from having to do five more things ten minutes ago, we can be given back to each other and to ourselves? To borrow imagery from the Hebrew Scriptures, when death’s dark angel “Sheathes his Sword,” could we resolve not to return to the “Slavery of Egypt,” but rest in a “Promised Land” of home and family and community and parish?

Sixth, and finally (because there were those Six Days of Creation), a return to our Sunday Eucharist with a hunger and appreciation for what it is we do there. To guard against ever taking it for granted again. To receive Him who is The Resurrection and The Life, and who nurtures and nourishes us as we “come out of our tombs” and continue our journey to Him.

May God Bless,
Fr. Grogan