

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

John 11:1-45

Our Scripture passage for this for this Sunday comes from the Gospel of John 11:1-45. This is the famous account of the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Jesus ends His public ministry on a high note with this greatest of all miracles. Jesus previously identified Himself with various "I AM" statements (I AM the living water, I AM the light of the world, and so forth), but in this passage He makes His greatest I AM claim yet: I AM the resurrection and the life. Each of these I AM statements tells us not just who Jesus is but also what He means for our lives. As with the other passages in John's Gospel, this reading has rich and profound meaning for us.

The passage begins by telling us about Lazarus' illness. Jesus does not want us to focus on the illness itself, however, so He explains that this tragedy is meant to be an occasion for God's revelation and glory. The passage then says that, "because Jesus loved Lazarus ... He delayed". That may strike us as odd. We would expect that our Lord's love for Lazarus would motivate Him to visit the sick man. Jesus explains that His love for the family will be manifested in works that demonstrate the glory of God and become the method by which the disciples come to faith. All of these statements give us an insight into the mind of God and how to read situations in our own world and personal lives as well. When we encounter situations of dire need, distress, or tragedy, we oftentimes find ourselves focusing on what's wrong, what's broken, and what needs help. By doing so, we can also begin to expect God to do something. However, Jesus wants us to approach situations of tragedy and ask the question, "How can I be an instrument who manifests the Glory of God in this moment?" That is a powerful re-orientation of our prayer and motivation for action. Additionally, we sometimes experience what appears to be God's delay when we are in a moment of need. Sometimes we expect the Lord to act immediately out of love for us, and we can become frustrated when Jesus doesn't do what we want and when we want it. This passage reminds us that Jesus is governed by something greater than human affections and expectations; He is governed by the will of the Father. Just because God doesn't act immediately is not a reason for us to doubt the Lord's love for us. Lastly, Jesus' love for His friends and the family of Lazarus is manifested above all by His giving glory to God and helping them come to faith. Perhaps the greatest gift we can give our family and friends is the same thing: deepened faith through a life that points to God and not us.

- 1. How do you manifest your love for your family and friends? What could you do to manifest your love for family and friends by showing them the glory of God and helping them become better disciples?*
- 2. When have you become frustrated or doubted God's love because the Lord has delayed His action in your life or the lives of your loved ones?*
- 3. How can we best teach people the virtue of patient endurance of faith?*
- 4. We all experience and encounter tragic situations, and Jesus doesn't want us to remain focused on what's wrong, what's broken, or what's injured; rather, the Lord wants us to be an instrument of God's glory in those situations. What are some of the tragic situations that have affected your life or the lives of others, and how can you be an instrument of God's glory in the midst of those situations?*
- 5. When have you been motivated to go with Jesus to bring God's glory to a*

desperate situation, even when it involved personal risk?

- 6. Mother Teresa faced tragic situations every day, and when she needed someone to help her she would say to them, "Would you do something beautiful for God?" That was her way of showing that every tragedy is an opportunity to manifest the Glory of God. How can you do something beautiful/or God today?*

Martha thinks she understands what Jesus is saying, and so we see her constantly interrupting Jesus and insisting on her own knowledge and interpretation of our Lord's statements. Because he presumes she knows all the answers, she fails to actually listen to Jesus. She remains locked in her false understanding of resurrection, her false understanding of Jesus' power (and lack of power), and her false understanding of the power of death. The tragedy of Lazarus' death has led her to cling more tightly to her own notions of reality than to accept Jesus' revelation of a new reality. In doing so, she cannot recognize the full power and authority of Jesus as the eternal Word of God in her midst. She has all the right language but not the right understanding. Her statements reveal that she considered Jesus just a miracle worker who could have intervened before things got too bad; or maybe a saint to whom God listens; or a teacher who gives us understanding and insight. She even considered Jesus as someone who had a special relationship with God and certain heavenly knowledge as the "Son of God"; but she did not grasp that Jesus is in Himself the very presence of God. Had she grasped that truth, she would have trusted in what He had to say rather than her own presumptions. The way in which we understand Jesus affects how we approach Him as well and how we listen to what He has to say to us. Jesus is the presence of the Living God in our midst. The purpose of our prayer is to come before the Lord so as to receive what He wants to give and to trust that our connection with Him is stronger than even death itself. Thus, the ultimate prayer of a disciple, in the midst of any situation, is to be joined to the divine life of God in Jesus. When we fail to grasp who Jesus really is, we trust more in ourselves, or other people, or our knowledge and experience of the world, or our anger and frustration in the midst of tragedy.

- 1. How has your understanding of who Jesus is grown over the course of time?*
- 2. What are some of the images of Jesus that you have grown through as you have matured in faith?*
- 3. How have those different images expressed themselves in changed prayer?*
- 4. How do you most express your faith in Jesus as the eternal Word of God present among us?*
- 5. How might Martha's interaction have been different if she had grasped the true identity of Jesus?*

In this passage, Jesus makes His greatest claim, "I AM the resurrection and the life; the one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live and whoever lives and believes in me will never die". This statement manifests Jesus' present and future sovereignty over believers. Eternal life starts in this life and is stronger than death. Our connection to Jesus means that physical death has no power over us as believers. As such, our future must be determined by faith in Jesus and not governed by the certainty of death. It also means that our present is determined by Jesus' power of life and His gift of eternal life. Death doesn't change our relationship with God. Our relationship with God changes death! However, much of our

lives can actually be spent chasing after things that pass away and don't last. Those are the temporal concerns of this world and they take up a lot of our time and energy. When we allow those concerns to dominate us, then we have actually allowed our lives to be defined by death rather than eternity with God. Although this Gospel message is oftentimes used for funeral homilies, it is really meant to change the way we live always and not just comfort us in times of loss. Every day of our lives is to be a manifestation of Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life within us. One of the Prefaces for the Funeral Mass highlights our transcendental vocation as sons and daughters of God with these words, "Indeed for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended, and when this earthly dwelling turns to dust, an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven".

1. *What does it look like when someone lives their life determined by death as opposed to living their life determined by eternity with God?*
2. *Who do you identify as someone that lives life with a constant focus on what is eternal rather than what is temporal?*
3. *What does the statement, "Death does not change our relationship with God; our relationship with God changes death; mean to you?"*
4. *Jesus wept when He saw people believing more in their experience of death than in His word of life-giving power.*
5. *When do you find yourself trusting more in the world as it appears rather than in the world Jesus proclaims and reveals?*
6. *Which of the three "I AM" statements of Jesus, has meant most to you during these three weeks of Lent: "I AM the Living Water", "I AM the Light of the World", or "I AM the Resurrection and the Life" and why?*