



April 3, 2022

Fifth Sunday in Lent

And Jesus wept. —John 11:35



Dear Friends,

Last week a family of a 57-year-old man who died of a massive heart attack appeared at morning mass. They wanted to arrange for the funeral of the husband and father. They had challenges in paying for the funeral. Fortunately, the Society of St Vincent de Paul and the Knights of Columbus were able to help with expenses.

Sunday, someone told me about their neighbor who kill himself. No one is sure exactly why, but he was struggling in his personal life. I promised to pray for him.

On Monday morning I was called to visit a 91-year-old woman who was recently placed on hospice. She was delightfully cheerful. She was happy to receive communion and the anointing of the sick. She had a prayerbook next to her chair called, "One Hour with Jesus." As I spoke with her, she said she had recently experienced the deaths of several family members. She was one of thirteen children. I said, "*Are you one of the younger ones?*" She said "*No, I am the oldest! And I don't know why I am still here. But I tell God if I am still here let me do what I am supposed to do.*" I said, "*I think that you supposed to be praying for the rest of us.*" She agreed and said she prays for her family and even people she does not know.

Monday afternoon I was called to prayer at the bedside of a young mother who was dying and leaving behind two young teenagers, a husband, a sister, and her parents. She did not belong to any religion, but her husband and children are members of St. Anne. I looked at the youngsters and got teary-eyed. I lost my mother when I was in my forties, I can't imagine hard that must be for them. I told them, "*I lost my mom twenty years ago, but I still talk to her. I believe that we carry all the people who pass through our lives in our hearts. I also believe love is stronger than death and we will see them again.*" They nodded and we prayed. I told the family this is the hard part, the waiting. It's like waiting for someone to be born you just don't know when. The woman's sister smiled and said, "*I like that, I never thought of the dying process like being born.*" Like Mary and the beloved disciple all we can do is stand beside the cross as our loved ones die.

In the story of the Raising of Lazarus Martha represents the grieving community. She asks the age-old question, "*If Jesus gives us eternal life, why are believers still dying?*" This story gives us a challenging response to the crisis of faith that can come from loss and grief. In John's Gospel the raising of Lazarus is the final straw that leads the Jewish leaders to seek the death of Jesus. They were threatened because many came to believe in Jesus. Jesus will be tried, crucified, buried, and raised. And in his resurrection all believers will have eternal life. But this faith gets shaken with the normal events of life.

Martha represents an inadequate faith; "*Lord if you had been here my brother would never have died.*" In other words, if Jesus had not left in his ascension he would still be with believers, and they then would not die. John's Gospel must correct the misunderstanding. Jesus is indeed "*the resurrection and life*" but resurrection does not mean resuscitation of a dead body to life as we know it. Rather resurrection means a transformation to a new kind of life. The eternal life Jesus gives does not mean death is abolished for believers, but we are called to go through and transcend death.

The story of Lazarus is a sign or symbol. Lazarus is the faithful disciple whom Jesus loved. And yet Lazarus dies. Jesus raises him to show that Jesus is the Lord of Life. Jesus will share with us the fate that we will all undergo which is death. And Jesus knows the feelings of loss that we feel. "*And Jesus wept*" powerfully speaks of the compassion of Jesus. Each time we experience the death of a loved one we are challenged to affirm our belief in the Risen One who gives us life eternal. And we possess that life now. Those who believe never really die. As one of our prayers for the dead proclaims, "*Lord for your faithful people life is changed not ended. When our earthly dwelling turns to dust, we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven.*"

Peace,

Fr Ron

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