

5th Sunday of Lent, April 6, 2025

When faith in Christ becomes difficult.

Optional readings for use with the OCIA.

Gospel of John 11: 1-45. The Story of Lazarus.

The Gospel of John was written to promote belief in Jesus as the Messiah (Christ) and the Son of God, leading to eternal life. However, many times, it becomes difficult to believe in God and trust in the power of Jesus to save, heal, deliver us, and help us. At that time, how do we navigate through this process? Martha gives us a road map in the gospel passage today.

“On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, **“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;** and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.” After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” (John 11: 17-28)

Sunday Reflections:

Jesus was invited when Lazarus became sick to heal him. However, Jesus waited for two days. Why did Jesus wait for two whole days to show up in the house of his friends? The delay of Jesus proves ‘fatal’ for Lazarus. I imagine that Mary and Martha would have been disappointed, or angry, or upset, or hurt. They were obviously sad that their only brother was dead because Jesus showed up a little too late.

“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died (John 11:21). Does this scenario seem familiar? Sometimes I have felt disappointed and angry at God when my prayers do not seem to be answered, at least not how and when I wanted them. There have been times when God showed up a little too late for me.

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God is in control of the universe. God is still in control of our lives. God loves and cares for us more than we are aware. This period of waiting is not a mistake or miscalculation, but part of Jesus' plan to generate faith in the disciples. (John 11:15, 42) Raising the dead to new life will have a more profound effect on them than raising the sick to health. Jesus has power over life and death as well as the power to forgive sins. Because He created life, Jesus can surely restore life. Faith in Christ gives us a spiritual life that death cannot diminish or conquer in any way. When we realize the power and the wonder of God's offer to us, how can we not commit our lives to him?

First reading: "I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, declares the Lord" (Ezekiel 37:14)

Second reading: "You are in the realm of the Spirit" (Romans 8:9, 10), "the Spirit gives life because of righteousness". "And the Spirit lives in you." (Romans 8: 8-11 New International Version)

The faith of Martha: Martha's faith fills her with confidence. Although she neither begs nor even asks Jesus to intervene for Lazarus, she knows that God's love is more powerful than death and leaves Jesus to handle the situation as he sees fit.

Jesus wept: Tears, not of despair, but tears of love and sympathy for Lazarus and his family. This small narrative detail points to an awesome theological mystery: Jesus, who became man in every respect except sin, experienced a full range of human emotions.

Mother Teresa on the Sacrament of Mercy: While Mother Teresa is certainly famous for the charity with which she poured herself out in love for Christ in the distressing disguise of lepers, AIDS victims, the dying, and the untouchables, she was likewise a great "Missionary of Mercy" in calling everyone to receive Jesus' forgiving love in the Sacrament of Confession, a Sacrament she received at least once a week. She would counsel others, "One thing is necessary for us: Confession. Confession is nothing but humility in action. We call it Penance, but it is a Sacrament of Love, a Sacrament of forgiveness. It is a place where I allow Jesus to take away from me everything that divides, that destroys. Confession is a beautiful act of great love. Only in confession can we enter as sinners with sin and leave as sinners without sin. ... There's no need for us to despair, no need for us to commit suicide, no need for us to be discouraged, if we have understood the tenderness of God's love." She said elsewhere, very simply, "Confession is Jesus and I, and nobody else." And then she told us, "Remember this for life."

Jesus came with the greatest gifts ever offered. The religious leaders hated Jesus so much. The crowds and his brothers did not want to be associated with him or his teaching, for fear of the Jews. As many will come to believe in Jesus, many would refuse his gifts of salvation no matter what He said or did. The more Jesus taught and worked publicly, the more these leaders would cause trouble for him and his followers. So, Jesus had to teach and work as quietly as possible. (John 7: 6-10) Many people today have the privilege of teaching, preaching, and worshiping publicly with little persecution, while others face imprisonment, church burnings, and even death. All believers should be thankful and make the most of their opportunities to proclaim the Good News, trusting that God will provide all they need.

When faith in Christ becomes difficult, remember these points:

1. It's okay to have doubts on a faith journey. Don't dismiss or judge these feelings; instead, recognize them as a normal part of the human experience.
2. Search the Bible (and spiritual books) for guidance and help.
3. Focus on the reasons for your faith and why you embraced Jesus Christ the first time.
4. Trust in God's timing: Trust that God will lead you through these difficult times and reveal Himself to you in His own time. It is a process.
5. Pray to the Holy Spirit for understanding and the strength to overcome your doubts.
6. Find some actions to help you and rekindle your faith in God's love and mercy.

Station of the Cross (The Way of the Cross. 6th station)

Veronica wipes the face of Jesus: Almighty and ever-loving God, we feel your love and understanding in the consolation and support we receive from one another. Give us, we beg you, the courage and dedication to sacrifice and suffer with those who are in need, the least of your people. Amen.

God bless you.

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