

SERMON LENT 5A.

Gathered here in Church it should be obvious that Holy week must be close now, only one week away, with the veiling of all the statues and crosses in the Church, a tradition that reminds us that the day when we remember the death of Christ draws ever nearer. That theme will intensify on Holy Thursday when after the mass of the last supper we remove all candles, holy water, veils, books etc from the church, symbolically stripping the church to remember the day when Jesus died. The veiling therefore reminds us to intensify our Lenten preparation, to continue those Lenten works of prayer, fasting and charity and most of all repentance of sin. To help us we have our latest Lenten Gospel reading to listen to, the 5th in our famous series of Gospel readings, gospels chosen especially for lent, to help guide us in our preparation for Easter, and to help guide especially those preparing to be baptised and received into the church at Easter, although of course those events like many others have had to be postponed.

We have heard the famous account of the raising of Lazarus from the dead, a miracle performed quite openly, in front of many people. It is an event that does remind us of Easter of when Our Lord himself rose from the dead, and also perhaps helps us understand why Jesus faced such opposition. In Johns Gospel, where we find this event recorded, we read that before this miracle Jesus had left Jerusalem and gone back to the far side of the Jordan, because the Jewish authorities had threatened to stone him because of his teaching. Then immediately after this miracle we are told that the Jewish authorities gather together and decide that they have to get rid of Jesus, he is too much of a threat to them, especially after raising a man to life who had been dead for 4 days. Why would they think like this, maybe they were convinced it was all a trick, maybe they thought Jesus was going to take over, maybe they were frightened of what the Roman Army might do. But whatever the reason, the raising of Lazarus, convinces the leaders that they must get rid of Jesus. The reaction to this miracle helps us to understand why there was such a conspiracy against Jesus.

Johns record of this event begins with telling us that Lazarus and his sisters were good friends of Jesus, in fact they crop up a number of times in the Gospels, they lived in Bethany only a couple of miles from Jerusalem. The news that Lazarus was ill takes a while to reach Jesus, with him being a good few days journey away on the far side of the Jordan. He delays though in going to Bethany-Why? Was he reluctant to go, uncertain whether to go back near to Jerusalem where there was such a threat to his life, or rather as he said-so that Gods glory may be seen, so that with Lazarus dead for a number of days there could be no doubt as to his returning him to life, no-one could say that it was all just a trick. When he finally does arrive he has that powerful meeting with Martha, Lazarus's sister, he proclaims himself to be the resurrection, and that whoever believes in him will never die, words perfectly fulfilled on that first Easter morning when he rose from the dead. And then we have Martha's great statement of faith-like the Samaritan woman in the Gospel of two weeks ago, like the healed blind man in last weeks Gospel, that she believes Jesus is the Son of God, the long promised saviour – it is that kind of faith we can try and imitate and find comfort in in these difficult days, Martha in the midst of her pain did not doubt, either I pray may we.

And it is this miracle that shows that Jesus was the son of God, only God could bring someone back to life who had been dead for 4 days, and off course only a son of God could come back to life himself after being in the tomb for 3 days. This miracle teaches us the same as the event of the transfiguration, the Gospel we heard on the 2nd Sunday of Lent, where Jesus showed his glory as God's son. But this miracle also reminds us about something else concerning Jesus, he wasn't just the Son of God, he wasn't just divine, he was also the Son of Mary, he was also a full human being in every way but sin. For we heard today one of the most powerful passages from scripture, outside the tomb of Lazarus Jesus wept, he knew the pain of the death of a loved one, he knew what it was like to grieve when a dearly loved friend suffered and died, and so over these days Our Lord grieves and weeps with us in the pain and difficulties may of us face. He knew the joy and pain of human friendship, he didn't just have a group of followers, he had friends, people like Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Come Easter we will also

celebrate this humanity of Jesus, we will remember his divinity when he rose to a new life, but also his humanity, for he did truly die on the cross, he suffered a true death as only a real human being can.

So this great miracle therefore really does direct our minds to what we will remember next week, our Lord's triumph over death, but we should also remember, that what happened to Jesus was far greater than what happened to Lazarus. Lazarus was returned to his earthly life, he would die again, his body lies in the grave waiting for the resurrection from the dead. But Jesus rose to a new life, his new glorified body would never die again, he would never need to suffer again, or know death again, he rose to an eternal life, which is what we look forward to, which is what Easter tells us we can look forward to, a new eternal life. So let us be like Martha, our Lord's good friend and put our faith in him, to renew our faith that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, that he is the Christ the son of God, who offers us that eternal life. Amen.

Finally this Monday here in OLSM we have our Lenten Penitential service, when a number of Belmont Priests will be available to hear confessions, an opportunity to fulfil that Lenten obligation.