

Lent Week 5 – 2026 Year A

Ezekiel 37:12-14; Psalm 129; Romans 8:8-11; John 11:25.26

Let us approach the raising of Lazarus from the dead from a little bit more of a distance than today's Gospel gives us. Jesus has been busy revealing that He is God, but people are not listening. And if they are listening, they are busy getting offended. Over the past few weeks we have heard how Jesus is giving people life. He sends the woman caught in adultery back home with her sins forgiven, and she has not been stoned to death by the crowd.¹ He has healed the Man born blind, and in doing so has given him a new life in reality, and not just because he can see now, but much more so because he has seen Jesus and been able to say 'I believe'.²

Jesus has not come to perform miracles, though. He has come to teach. By teaching he is seeking to reveal who He really is, and by revealing who He really is, he is performing an act of Divine Mercy, because he wants to point us to God the Father. I will come back to this idea.

How does Jesus teach? He usually teaches using images, such as the one that depicts him as the 'Good Shepherd', one who protects those who are under his care 'I lay down my life for the sheep'³ He teaches that he is like a door, or gate, into a safe pasture.⁴ He teaches, speaking so that 'they will listen to my voice'.⁵ And he teaches that he brings unity: 'there will be one flock, one shepherd.'

¹ John 8

² Ibid 6:38

³ 10:15

⁴ 10:9

Sometimes he teaches more directly. This is when the light he is trying to shed in people's lives and about himself can become too bright and they shut their eyes in the face of that brightness or they look away. By this I mean they stop listening to Him or they even try to kill him. 'I and the Father are one.' I imagine that these words were followed first by a shocked silence. Did they hear this correctly? Then came confusion. Did you hear what he said? Then came the deadly anger, and they stooped down to pick up rocks, weapons to kill him with. Somehow, he slips away. They are blind with fury.

Jesus withdraws to where John's Gospel began, to where he was baptised by John. His disciples can breathe easier.

Then comes the news that his friend Lazarus is close to death. Lazarus lives in Bethany, just under 2 miles from Jerusalem, back towards danger. Jesus delays. Does Jesus delay just to let Lazarus die, just so he can raise him from the dead and show his power? Possibly. But more. It is fulfilment. Back in chapter 5 Jesus has talked about his authority, the authority God the Father has given him. Here Jesus has given and extended revelation about his relationship with the Father:

*'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does the Son does likewise.... For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.'*⁶

⁵ Ibid 10:16

⁶ John 5:19-21

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We remember this as Jesus approaches the tomb of Lazarus. Martha says that she believes in the resurrection of the dead, but places it at the end of time, on the last day. Jesus declares *'I am the resurrection and the life'*, thereby separating the resurrection of the dead with its association with the end of time and locating it clearly in the authority of his own person, in the present. Standing before the tomb that holds the body of Lazarus, who has been dead 4 days and should have begun to decay, Jesus says:

"Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me. When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice. 'Lazarus, come out.'

What seems noticeable is that this Jesus' prayer to the Father speaks in the past tense: *'I said this on account of the people'*. What he has already prayed to the Father he now speaks words that the crowd can hear, so that they can understand: *'Lazarus, come out'*. Lazarus obeys. Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life.

The miracle is not really that Lazarus is risen from the dead, although we might naturally fixate on this. The miracle the Lord of Life walking amongst his people. The raising of Lazarus from the dead is not the glory of God working, Jesus is the Glory of God working.

To close, I return to the image of Divine Mercy. This is Divine Mercy: that the Glory of God has walked among his people so that they might recognize him, choose him and live. He is saying to each one of us personally: *'Lazarus, come out'*. Easter is Jesus.