

# LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL



[www.orlaghinthecity.ie](http://www.orlaghinthecity.ie)

**FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT**

**22nd March 2026**

**Text: John 11:1-45**  
**See at end of docuemnt**

Now we come to the last public act of Jesus in the fourth gospel. As with the previous two dramatic stories, a metaphor is presented to us that challenges us to reflect deeply about who Jesus really is and what it is that he brings. He not only satisfies our thirst for God and allows us to see, in fact he brings us a completely new life. The woman's thirst, the man's blindness and Lazarus' mortality are all means by which we are brought to understand that Jesus is indeed 'the resurrection and the life'. The raising of Lazarus is the culmination of the seven 'signs' that are worked by Jesus in this gospel. The evangelist deliberately avoids the term miracle because he wants us to think about what Jesus' actions tell us about God's will for humanity. In restoring Lazarus to life Jesus anticipates the meaning of his own death: 'I have come that you may have life and have it to the full' (John 10.10). As the story unfolds we identify with the grief of Martha and Mary at the death of their brother, and their disappointment that Jesus, their friend, did not do something to prevent it. In the midst of their pain, Jesus invites them to see from another perspective but even he is overcome with sorrow and weeps. At this low point he calls on them all to have the faith that will allow them to see the glory of God, and God's glory is precisely what he reveals. Lazarus comes out of the tomb and the story comes to an end with the significant words: 'Unbind him and let him go free'. Ironically the raising of Lazarus from the dead is the reason why Jesus is put to death according to the gospel of John. He will lay down his life for us and in the mystery of the resurrection will reveal God's indestructible desire for our salvation.'

**(Sean Goan: Let the Reader Understand, Year A, p.39-40)**

As on last Sunday, we have a long passage in which several stories are interwoven.

Jesus brings Lazarus out of the tomb; this is experienced as a liberation from bondage "–Unbind him and let him go free." Identify with Lazarus from your experience. He symbolizes those who have been written off (by others but also by themselves) as dead – people? communities? a country or a civilization?

Jesus leads Martha (and to a lesser extent Mary) to a new insight into the power of faith over death by his teaching (vs. 25 and 26) and by commanding her to take the stone away (vs. 29 and 40). Recognize this journey from your own discovery of the power of faith over the forces of death and whatever keeps us in bondage. Where is Jesus teaching us this by word and example?

Lord, we remember today the times when we were like Lazarus in the tomb, rejected, discouraged, in despair, feeling that life was not worth living, overwhelmed by guilt so that we wanted to hide ourselves away from the world.

We thank you that you sent Jesus to us as we lay in the tomb –  
a friend, a parent, uncle or aunt, some member of our church community –  
and this Jesus loved us,  
reached out to us in the tomb,  
and in a loud, confident voice, called us to come out. Thank you, Lord.

**Michel DeVerteuil      Lectio Divina with the Sunday Gospels**

## **POINTERS FOR PRAYER**

1. Martha and Mary were people of faith but Jesus led them to an even deeper faith. Who were the people who led you to a deeper faith in Jesus? Remember them and give thanks.

2. Martha and Mary were struggling to come to terms with their bereavement. What has helped you in similar situations?

3. The concern of Jesus is palpable and touching. Recall those who matter to you and to whom you matter. Such love mediates God's love, which surpasses human love with the gift of new life and Easter joy.

4. One can imagine Lazarus as a symbol of people and groups that are written off as dead (sometimes by themselves), and yet through faith come back to life again. Have you had the experience of being revived by faith? Has faith helped to free you from what held you in bondage, or was destructive of your life?

**JOHN BYRNE OSA - Intercom**

The final farewell to a loved one plunges us inevitably into sorrow, leaving us feeling powerless and without purpose. It is as if the whole of our lives has been destroyed. No words or explanations can console us. What is there to hope in?

John's account is not only intended to narrate the resurrection of Lazarus, but beyond that to awaken our faith, so that we not only believe in the resurrection a distant event that will take place at the end of the world, but also that we may see that God is already here and now, infusing life into those we have buried.

The story ends with a shocking scene. Lazarus has his hands and his feet bound in linen strips and his face wrapped in a cloth. He has the signs and the bonds of death. However the dead man comes out by himself. He is alive.

This is the faith of those who believe in Jesus: those whom we bury and abandon in death still live. God has not abandoned them. Take away the stone with faith. Our dead are alive.

## **JOSE A PAGOLA \_ Following in the Footsteps of Jesus**

### **KIND OF WRITING**

This is the last and most significant symbolic tableau in the Fourth Gospel. It explores the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus for believers. It is the climax of "seven signs", which undergird the narrative of the Fourth Gospel, thus taking us to the heart of this Gospel's teaching.

### **OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND**

By and large in the Old Testament, there is no real conviction about a genuine life after death. There are exceptions. Ezekiel, writing during the Babylonian Exile (587-539 BC) and speaking metaphorically, describes the future restoration of the next generation using the language of resurrection (Ezekiel 37 – the Valley of the Dry Bones). The Book of Daniel teaches the resurrection (Daniel 12:2), as does 2 Maccabees 12. The context here is martyrdom. In that context, the question of God's faithfulness to those who have been faithful till death became acute. In order to continue to speak of God as just, a teaching about reward and resurrection in the next life emerged. The driving force is not speculation about the human condition but the need to continue to speak of God as just. Finally, in some of the psalms there is a possible hint at something more: Psalms 16:9-11, 49:15.

### **FINAL COMMENT**

This intensely human account has a profoundly consoling message: the resurrection, realised and offered in the person of Jesus, is the supreme gesture of God's love towards humanity. In Jesus, God reaches out to the tragedy of the human condition and to each one of us. This is the "tender mercy" of our God (Luke 1:78).

### **Thought for the day**

The historical Jesus was guarded in declaring his identity but by the time the Fourth Gospel was written, Christians had arrived at a rich understanding of the mystery of Jesus, the Son of God. John's Gospel puts before the believer a grand assemblage of 7 I AM sentences, rooted in the name of God in Exodus 3:14, I AM WHO I AM.

I am the bread of life. (John 6:35, 48, 51);

I am the light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5);

I am the gate for the sheep (John 10:7, 9);

I am the good shepherd (John 10:11, 14);

I am the resurrection and the life (John 11:25);

I am the way, and the truth, and the life (John 14:6);

I am the true vine (John 15:1, 5).

We are reminded that we believe first of all in a person, not in a philosophy. Anyone one of these images would take us deeply into our encounter with the Risen Lord, none more so than "I am the resurrection and the life."

**KIERAN O'MAHONY OSA - [www.tarsus.ie](http://www.tarsus.ie)**

In confronting the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus confronts every culture of death throughout history, including our own. Here marks the end of greed, poverty, elections, nuclear weapons, environmental destruction and every injustice. And it falls to us, following the example of the non-violent Jesus, to carry on the work until it is fulfilled." (John Dear)

*Mary and Martha plead with Jesus, then they grieve, and then they almost resist the possibility of new life. It's too much for them. Can you relate to experiences of this in your own life?*

*What comes to mind when you think of a culture of death? Where do you see people trying to move the stone? Where do you see people liberated, free to live in the fullness of life?*

**TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT - Go Deeper**

## Gospel John 11:1-45

There was a man named Lazarus who lived in the village of Bethany with the two sisters, Mary and Martha, and he was ill. It was the same Mary, the sister of the sick man Lazarus, who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair. The sisters sent this message to Jesus, 'Lord, the man you love is ill.' On receiving the message, Jesus said, 'This sickness will end not in death but in God's glory, and through it the Son of God will be glorified.'

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when he heard that Lazarus was ill he stayed where he was for two more days before saying to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judaea.' The disciples said, 'Rabbi, it is not long since the Jews wanted to stone you; are you going back again?' Jesus replied:

'Are there not twelve hours in the day?

A man can walk in the daytime without stumbling because he has the light of this world to see by; but if he walks at night he stumbles, because there is no light to guide him.'

He said that and then added, 'Our friend Lazarus is resting, I am going to wake him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he is able to rest he is sure to get better.' The phrase Jesus used referred to the death of Lazarus, but they thought that by 'rest' he meant 'sleep', so Jesus put it plainly, 'Lazarus is dead; and for your sake I am glad I was not there because now you will believe. But let us go to him.' Then Thomas – known as the Twin – said to the other disciples, 'Let us go too, and die with him.'

On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to sympathise with them over their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus had come she went to meet him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, 'If you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that, even now, whatever you ask of God, he will grant you.' 'Your brother' said Jesus to her 'will rise again.' Martha said, 'I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said:

'I am the resurrection and the life.

If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

Do you believe this?'

'Yes, Lord,' she said 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.'

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in a low voice, 'The Master is here and wants to see you.' Hearing this, Mary got up quickly and went to him. Jesus had not yet come into the village; he was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were in the house sympathising with Mary saw her get up so quickly and go out, they followed her, thinking that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Mary went to Jesus, and as soon as she saw him she threw herself at his feet, saying, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' At the sight of her tears, and those of the Jews who followed her, Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart, 'Where have you put him?' They said, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus wept; and the Jews said, 'See how much he loved him!' But there were some who remarked, 'He opened the eyes of the blind man, could he not have prevented this man's death?' Still sighing, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, 'Take the stone away.' Martha said to him, 'Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day.' Jesus replied, 'Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said:

'Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer.

I knew indeed that you always hear me,  
but I speak for the sake of all these who stand round me,  
so that they may believe it was you who sent me.'

When he had said this, he cried in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, here! Come out!' The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with bands of stuff and a cloth round his face. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, let him go free.'

Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what he did believed in him.