

Homily for the fifth Sunday in Lent.
March 28-29, 2009

Imagine that dead man Lazarus In the darkness of the tomb. He is wrapped tightly in the winding cloths of his burial. He cannot hear, he cannot see, he cannot feel. He is dead.

He is dead to light, He is dead to joy, and he is dead to love.

In the cold and dark of his tomb, the voice of Jesus intrudes. Very faintly, like a distant memory. Somewhere in the decay of his mind, there is a spark of light born by the voice of Jesus. That spark brings a faint memory of warmth and joy.

From the decay of death life begins to flicker. It is Jesus who calls the dead mans name, and with Jesus call, Lazarus remembers life.

Jesus calls out, **“Lazarus!”**, and Lazarus begins to remember and recognize who it is who is calling him. It is the Lord of life, it is the voice of love, it is the call of his creator. Jesus’ call gives Lazarus a recollection of why he has reason to live. Jesus knows his name, and that gives him reason to live.

But how can he live wrapped in death and infected with decay? How can he move toward Jesus? If he does not move, he remains mired in death and decay and rot will have the victory.

But if Lazarus can respond, he will return to the warmth and the joy of life. He needs help. He needs God’s grace, and he finds it in Jesus call, **“Lazarus, Come out!”**

Now Lazarus walks toward Jesus’ voice. It is an effort, because he is still bound and still surrounded by

darkness and the destructive decay still invades his body. But He does what he can to move toward Jesus voice.

Once he begins to move, God's grace takes over. It is all God's grace now. Christ says to those surrounding Lazarus, **“Untie him and let him go free”**. The grace of God provides him with all that he needs now to live, to be free of the binding, free of the darkness and free of death.

John tells us this account for two reasons. First, to show that Jesus is not just a prophet, but He is the Son of God, He is one in being with the Father. He is the Lord of life who has power to destroy death. This is also a preparation for His disciples to understand and accept Jesus' own death and resurrection.

Secondly, John wants us to know that Lazarus is a symbol for you and me.

We can become dead to God's life and joy. We can allow ourselves to be wrapped and bound in habits of sin and selfishness. Our angers and our pride can smother the light of Christ's love and trap us in a tomb of resentment and hopelessness.

Rather than living as children of the Lord of light we go through life like dead men and women.

This is the season for us to hear Jesus call our names. Perhaps it is only a memory of a long ago time when we had faith, and believed. But it carries with it a spark of hope. We must turn to Jesus and move toward him. The Sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation are the help that Jesus has given us to help us move toward him. If we make the choice to move toward him, His grace will untie us and let us go free.