



SUNDAY GOSPEL

Freed – Even from Death

John 11:1, 17, 20-27, 32-33, 38-44

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do

you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.' ■

GOSPEL REFLECTION

Fr Mark De Battista

The raising of Lazarus is preceded by an important dialogue between Martha and Jesus where Martha expresses her faith in Jesus not only by saying that had he been there beforehand her brother would not have died (Incidentally, the same phrase uttered by Mary later on), but also that even now she knows that whatever he asks of God, God will grant it to him. In the Greek text there are several words for the verb 'to know' but the verb used by Martha indicates that her knowledge is certain knowledge and thus indicating a very strong faith in Jesus' power. Moreover, when Jesus asks her if she believes that he is the resurrection and the life, Martha answers by saying "yes/surely", but she also tells Jesus, "I believe that you are the Christ, the son of God..."

However, the more correct translation is 'I have believed...'; thus indicating that the faith of Martha had never wavered and was never in question. This begs the question as to why Jesus asks her the question about belief in the first place? Her response is the answer, "You are the Christ the son of God, the one coming into the world." It is this full expression of faith in Jesus as the Christ which merits the miracle of the raising of her brother from the dead. ■

A WORD FROM POPE FRANCIS

Lazarus had already been dead four days, before Jesus arrived; and what he said to the sisters Martha and Mary is engraved forever in the memory of the Christian community. Jesus speaks like this: “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die”. With this word of the Lord we believe that the life of whoever believes in Jesus and follows his Commandment after death will be transformed into new life, full and immortal. As Jesus is resurrected with his own body, though he does not return to an earthly life, so too will we be raised with our bodies which will have been transfigured into glorified bodies. He expects us with the Father, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, who raised him,

he will also raise those who are united to him.

Christ is not resigned to the tombs that we have built for ourselves with our choice for evil and death, with our errors, with our sins. He is not resigned to this! He invites us, almost orders us, to come out of the tomb in which our sins have buried us. He calls us insistently to come out of the darkness of that prison in which we are enclosed, content with a false, selfish and mediocre life. “Come out!”, he says to us, “Come out!”. It is an invitation to true freedom, to allow ourselves to be seized by these words of Jesus who repeats them to each one of us today. It is an invitation to let ourselves be freed from the “bandages”, from the bandages of pride. For pride makes of us slaves, slaves to ourselves, slaves to

so many idols, so many things. Our resurrection begins here: when we decide to obey Jesus’ command by coming out into the light, into life; when the mask falls from our face — we are frequently masked by sin, the mask must fall off! — and we find again the courage of our original face, created in the image and likeness of God.

Jesus’ act of raising Lazarus shows the extent to which the power of God’s grace can go, and, thus, the extent of our conversion, our transformation. Listen carefully: there is no limit to the divine mercy offered to everyone! Remember this sentence. And we can all say it together: “there is no limit to divine mercy which is offered to all people!”. The Lord is always ready to remove the tombstone of our sins, which keeping us apart from him, the light of the living. ■

TALKING POINTS

1. Pope Francis and Fr Mark both highlight the importance Martha’s sureness of faith plays in Christ’s action in our lives – to heal us, to save us. What ways could we feed our faith so it becomes and remains strong?
2. In the Gospel, Jesus calls others to help unbind Lazarus and set him free. In our community, how can we help “unbind” each other so we can experience true freedom? (Welcome? Family groups? Praying for each other?)

PRAYER POINTS

Pray for each other: Ask about and pray for the needs of the group members. Individuals might pray for themselves or ask someone else to pray for them.

Reflect: Pope Francis tells us “Listen carefully: there is no limit to the divine mercy offered to everyone!” The call from the tomb into freedom is for us all. Spend some time with Jesus asking Him to show you where you are most in need of freedom and consider making use of the Sacrament of Confession.

Response: *If the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free (Jn 8:36).*

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus, you said to Lazarus “Come out! Come out!” and he walked from darkness into light. We ask that you show us that areas of our lives where we live in darkness and we beg you to call us into life. Amen.

