

## GOSPEL

*John 11:3-7. 17. 20-27. 33-45 (Shorter form)*

The sisters Martha and Mary 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.'

On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. 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.' Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart, 'Where have you put him?' They 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.'

## A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

*26 March 2023*

Today, the fifth Sunday of Lent, the Gospel presents to us the resurrection of Lazarus (cf. Jn 11:1-45). It is the last of Jesus' miracles narrated before Easter: the resurrection of his friend Lazarus. Jesus knows that his dear friend Lazarus is about to die. He sets out on his journey, but arrives at his house four days after the burial, when by then all hope had been lost. His presence, however, rekindles a little confidence in the hearts of the sisters Martha and Mary (cf. vv. 22, 27). They cling to this light, to this small hope, despite their suffering. Jesus invites them to have faith and asks for the tomb to be opened. He then prays to the Father and shouts to Lazarus: "Come out!" (v. 43). And the latter comes back to life and comes out. This is the miracle, just like that, simple.

The message is clear: Jesus gives life even when it seems that all hope has gone. It happens, at times, to feel hopeless — this has happened to us all — or to meet people who have given up hope; embittered by bad experiences, the wounded heart cannot hope. Because of a painful loss, an illness, a bitter disappointment, a wrong or a betrayal suffered, a grave error committed... they have given up hope. At times we hear some say that "there is nothing more to be done!"; and they close the door to all hope. They are moments when life seems to be a sealed tomb: everything is dark, and we can see only sorrow and despair around us. Today's miracle tells us that it is not like that, this is not the end, that in these moments we are not alone. On the contrary, it is precisely in these moments that He comes closer than ever to restore life to us. Jesus weeps: the Gospel tells us that Jesus wept in front of Lazarus' tomb, and today Jesus weeps with us, as he was able to weep for Lazarus: the Gospel repeats twice that he is moved (cf. vv. 33, 38), emphasizing that he burst into tears (cf. v. 35). And at the same time Jesus invites us not to stop believing and hoping, not to let ourselves be crushed by the negative feelings that take away our tears. He approaches our tombs and says to us, as then: "Take away the stone" (v. 39). In these moments, it is as though we have a stone inside, and the only one capable of removing it is Jesus, with his words: "Take away the stone".

Jesus says this to us too. Take away the stone: the pain, the mistakes, even the failures. Do not hide them inside you, in a dark, lonely, closed room. Take away the stone: draw out everything that is inside. "Ah, but I am ashamed". Throw it to me with confidence, says the Lord; I will not be scandalized. Throw it to me without fear because I am with you, I care about you and I want you to start living again. And, as he did with Lazarus, he repeats to each

one of us: Come out ! Rise again, get back on the path, regain your confidence! How many times, in life, did we find ourselves like this, in this situation of not having the strength to get up again. And Jesus: “Go, go on! I am with you.” I will take you by the hand, says Jesus, like when you were a child learning to take your first steps. Dear brother, dear sister, take off the bandages that bind you (cf. v. 45); please, do not give in to the pessimism that depresses, do not give in to the fear that isolates, do not give in to the discouragement caused by the memory of bad experiences, do not give in to the fear that paralyses. Jesus tells us, “I want you to be free. I want you alive, I will not abandon you and I am with you! Everything is dark, but I am with you! Do not let yourself be imprisoned by pain, do not let hope die. Brother, sister, come back to life!”. “And how can I do this?”. “Take my hand”, and he takes us by the hand. Let yourself be pulled out — and he is capable of doing it — in these bad moments that happen to us all.

Dear brothers and sisters, this passage in chapter 11 of the Gospel of John which does a great deal of good to read, is a hymn to life, and it is proclaimed when Easter is near. Perhaps we too in this moment carry in our heart some burden or some suffering that seems to crush us; something bad, some old sin we cannot bring out, some youthful mistake, you never know. These bad things need to come out. And Jesus says, “Come out!”. So, it is the moment to take away the stone and to go out towards Jesus, who is close. Can we open our hearts to him and entrust our worries to him? Do we do it? Are we able to open the tomb of problems — are we capable — and look over the threshold, towards his light, or are we afraid of this? And in turn, as small mirrors of God’s love, do we manage to illuminate the surroundings in which we live with words and gestures of life? Do we bear witness to the

hope and joy of Jesus — we, sinners, all of us? And also, I would like to say some words to confessors: dear brothers, do not forget that you too are sinners, and you are in the confessional not to torture but to forgive, and to forgive everything, just as the Lord forgives everything. May Mary, Mother of Hope, renew in us the joy of not feeling alone and the call to bring light into the darkness that surrounds us.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



**Head:** Why does Jesus delay his arrival and then ask for the stone to be removed, instead of acting immediately — and what does this reveal about how God works with faith, grief, and human cooperation?



**Heart:** Where do I recognise myself in Martha’s response — believing in Jesus, yet hesitating when he draws close to something painful, unresolved, or embarrassing in my own life?



**Hands:** What concrete interior step am I being invited to take this week to “take away the stone” — not by fixing the situation, but by allowing Jesus access to what I have sealed off or learned to live with?

## PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the ‘Glory Be’.