

## 2020 5<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT

Today's Gospel, telling the story of Jesus raising His dead friend, Lazarus, to life, is very much a high point in St. John's Gospel. Within the overall Gospel, Jesus makes seven "I am" statements; all of which point directly to Jesus' inner identity as the divine Second Person of the Trinity. Each of the "I am" statements is enclosed in a very human story. Within the Lazarus story, Jesus says of Himself: "*I am the Resurrection and the Life*". This is very much the climax of Jesus' "I am" statements.

At no stage does Jesus ever promise anyone freedom or immunity from sickness or death. But Jesus' statement "*I am the resurrection and the life. If anyone believes in Me, even though that person dies, that person will live*" reminds us that after our deaths Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life, will reach towards us and raise us to a new, more glorious, form of living. This gives us a great hope.

And don't we all need a good infusion of Christian hope at this time! The whole world has been plunged into fear by the corona virus. Every person knows that they could easily fall victim to this dreadful plague. Nobody is immune. We have been told to shut ourselves away from each other. Even the simple comfort of a hug is forbidden to us. We have been deprived of the sacraments and from the joy of coming together to worship.

But take comfort- we are not alone. Our wonderful God is with us.

During the week I have said a private Mass every day. As I made the Sign of the Cross at the beginning of Mass, I imagined all of you, my dear parishioners, family and friends there before me. I spoke every word of the Mass out loud as if you were there and I spoke slowly and with passion. And, you know, I felt that you were there with me; that I was not alone. And in truth, never have I felt closer to the Lord while celebrating Mass than I have over the last week. Each Mass has been the highlight of my day.

On Friday I made the Stations of the Cross at 6.00pm in the Church. Initially I felt the absence of the many parishioners who would normally have been there. But as I represented all of you, I felt wonderfully close to our Suffering Saviour.

I have felt as I used to feel during the days of the first fervour of my youth.

I believe this to be a gift from the Lord to tide me over these days.

As I have grown older, the Lord has deprived me of a sense of His closeness at prayer. And I have no quarrel with this. God has taken away His consolations to strengthen my faith. He wants me to mature as an adult in the Faith.

But I sense that during this time of absence, God is stepping back a little and giving me consolations I haven't experienced for years. Because God loves me and knows my need for consolation at this time.

And I am sure it will be the same for all of you.

So use this time of enforced solitude well. Have a sacred place in your home. Build up a rhythm of prayer and reflective reading for each day. And know that God will be especially close to you. You will feel yourself hugged by Jesus and by His Mother.

Think of Martha and Mary. They were plunged into darkness by the death of their beloved brother, Lazarus. Martha, as we all do, looked for someone to blame and blamed Jesus for Lazarus' death. She felt that He should have been there to work a miracle for them.

But when Jesus came everything changed.

And so it will be for all of us.

Hear the Lord say to you as He said to the dead Lazarus: "Be unbound, be set free"- of your frustrations, your boredom and your worries.

Tomorrow, after I have read the Gospel, I will think of you all. I will raise my arms and I will say: "In the Name of Jesus Christ, who is the Resurrection and the Life, may all of my parishioners, my family, my friends and those who look to me for prayer, be set free of all that afflicts them."

The miracle of the Raising of Lazarus was a sign given by Jesus to people of all time to reveal that he is- in truth- our Saviour- the One Whose greatest delight it is to undo all the bonds which inhibit us from being the full, vibrant person we have been created to be.

And so at this time- when our spirits are being battered- when perhaps we feel spiritually and emotionally dead- be like Martha and Mary- welcome Jesus into your hearts- and pray for help- relying on Him, Who is the Resurrection and the Life, to lift you from any depression you may be feeling, opening yourselves to new life.

God bless you all.

Mons Frank.