

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Apr 6th 2014

The parish in which I grew up has beautiful stained glass windows featuring scenes from the Gospel. As a daydreamer I can remember getting lost in the stories the windows tell. My favorite window features Martha and Mary relating to Jesus, each in her unique way, during a visit to their home. I now know that what I once thought of as daydreaming is a powerful form of Ignatian contemplative prayer during which I can place myself in the Gospel and imagine the sights and sounds and smells and feelings. It is through this imagination that I can hear what I need to hear from God.

In today's Gospel John tells us of the death of Lazarus and of Jesus bringing him back to life here on earth. The story of Lazarus is so familiar to me and is foundational in my belief about the promise by Jesus for resurrection of all who believe. After hearing this powerful Gospel so many times I am curious about what I need to hear this Lenten season.

As I read the Gospel I am transported to Bethany to the home of Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary. These women from the beautiful stained glass window come to life in my imagination. I feel the anguish the sisters experience as they watch their beloved brother struggle with a devastating illness and then watch the life drain out of him. I can relate to the desperate attempts to nurse Lazarus back to health. And I feel the frustration when Jesus waits two days to come to the aid of Lazarus knowing that if Jesus were with us Lazarus would not die.

The sense of loss of our brother is overwhelming. And then I feel selfish for having wanted to keep him here on earth as I believe in Jesus and I believe my brother will rise in the resurrection. As I continue to imagine this scene I can relate to my sister and I needing to manage the tasks associated with the death of a loved one. Lazarus must be prepared for burial and laid to rest. Our home must be kept in order and my sister and I must be ready to greet those who come to comfort us when we would simply rather be alone in our grief and anger. I feel betrayed by Jesus who I love so much but who failed to come in my time of need. When Jesus does arrive at the tomb of Lazarus I feel worry and shame that Jesus will encounter a overpowering stench. And finally I feel joy at seeing my brother alive and healthy once again. I appreciate the sense of wonder expressed by all who are present. My love for Jesus abounds.

The sights and sounds and smells and feelings from this prayer leave me with these questions for these last two weeks of Lent: How can I be present and caring to my loved ones? When do I let despair or anger prevent me from being open to God's love? When do I selfishly cling to those I love? How can I live my life as a trusting testament to my faith?

As Jesus told Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will

live and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.”

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