

5 Lent A 2017 SML
JN 11:1-45

Whenever you experience death, remember the words of St. Paul:

I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature . . . I am convinced that death will not separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

This evening's (morning's) gospel brings us face to face with death. The raising of Lazarus was the most striking miracle in John's gospel, it was the climax of all Jesus' signs, and it was the dress rehearsal for the resurrection of our Blessed Lord.

Taking a closer look at the raising of Lazarus and the resurrection of our Blessed Lord, notice there are striking similarities:

In both the raising of Lazarus and the resurrection of Our Blessed Lord, there were mourning women:

- ✓ The sisters of Lazarus, Martha and Mary
- ✓ And Mary Magdalene

In both the raising of Lazarus and the resurrection of Our Blessed Lord, there were tears being shed:

- ✓ Mary wept, the Jews wept, and Jesus himself wept.
- ✓ But Mary Magdalene stayed outside the tomb weeping. And as she wept, she bent over the tomb and saw two

angels in white. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

In both the raising of Lazarus and the resurrection of Our Blessed Lord, there was a rock hewn grave.

In both the raising of Lazarus and the resurrection of Our Blessed Lord, detail was given to the clothing:

- ✓ The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth.
- ✓ When Simon Peter arrived after John, Peter went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his face rolled up in a separate place by itself.

But the most misunderstood similarity in both the raising of Lazarus and the resurrection of Our Blessed Lord was, in both, Jesus seemed to keep himself at a distance:

- ✓ Yet after hearing that Lazarus was sick, He stayed on where He was for two days more.
- ✓ Mary, do not even touch me for I have not yet ascended to the Father.

When we come face to face with death, more specifically, when we experience the death of a loved one, it seems so many times that Christ is distant. And Martha takes the words right out of our mouths. "Lord, if you had you been here, my brother would never have died."

Martha knew Our Blessed Lord, and Our Blessed Lord knew her. Jesus loved Martha. Jesus and Martha were raised

in the same Pharisaical tradition. Therefore they had the same belief in the afterlife. They believed Lazarus was in Sheol, a place of light and happiness, but a place where Yahweh was not.

When we come face to face with death, it seems for so many of us, that Christ is not there. Talk to anyone who has buried a child. Talk to my brother. Depending on the circumstances of that death, months go by, sometimes even years, and whether Our Blessed Lord is standing right in front of you or He is two day's journey away, you feel like Christ is no where to be found.

I will never forget my brother pulling me to the side in the hospital as his son Geoff lie brain dead in his bed. "Dan, what do we need to do to get a miracle here?" In other words, "Lord, if you had been here, my son would never have died. He would never have died in the first place."

In the theater these past few weeks is a movie entitled "The Shack," based on a book by the same title written by William Paul Young. The Shack is a "guy meets God" novel about a man named Mack whose youngest daughter has been abducted during a family vacation and evidence that she may have been brutally murdered is found in an abandoned shack deep in the Oregon wilderness. Four years later, Mack receives a

suspicious note, apparently from God, inviting him back to that shack for the weekend. There He meets the Trinity . . .

One of the saddest, yet one of the most comforting parts of the book was the heart to heart talk that Mack had with God, asking Him about where He was while his daughter was being abused and murdered. Mack wept, and Jesus gently pulled him into His arms and held him. Here is God's response in the book:

Mack, she was never alone. I never left her; we [the Trinity] never left her, not for one instant. I could no more abandon her, or you, than I could abandon myself ... [T]here was not a moment that we were not with her. She knew my peace and you would have been so proud of her. She was so brave.~ *The Shack* page 175

“I could no more abandon her, or you, than I could abandon myself ...”

Pay attention to the reading of the Passion next weekend and catch a glimpse of the mind of our Blessed Lord in the hour of his death. Matthew is clear. It is the hour of my death. My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Was Jesus (who is God, mind you) abandoned by God? That's the question.

Richard John Neuhaus, in his book, Death on a Friday Afternoon, has this to say about the words of Our Blessed Lord from the cross, “My God, My God, why have you abandoned

me?:”

Always before, Jesus addressed God as “Father.” When speaking to God or about God, it was with great familiarity .

“All things have been give over to me by my Father . . .”

“No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son . . .”

In the garden, Jesus prayed, “Abba (literally Daddy), all things are possible. Remove this cup . . . “

Now, (hanging on the cross), having drunk the dregs of the cup, He cries out as mortals beyond number have cried in their agony – not to a familiar or to a beloved, not to “Father,” but to “God” out there somewhere, radically “other,” radically indifferent.

But note that (for Jesus), even the apparently absent God is still “MY God, MY God.” He was mine before – may He not be (mine) again?”

One who cries out, “My God, My God” – although he is crying to a God experienced as absent – has not lost hope.

There was not at Golgotha – as there was at His Baptism, as there was at His Transfiguration, a voice from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

At Golgotha, heaven was silent. The important thing, the devastating thing, is that there is no answer from the One to whom He calls out in the darkness. “My God, My God, why

have you forsaken me?" There was no answer. Heaven was silent.

"My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?" is a surrender and the surrender is precisely to the unqualified lost of control that is death. The secret here is not the abandonment "by" God, but rather the abandonment "to" God. Hence the words of Our Blessed Lord from the cross, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" make perfect sense.

Face to face with death, Jesus was not abandoned, and neither are we.

For the words of St. Paul ring so true, especially at the moment of death. I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature . . . I am convinced that death will not separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.