

**Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis**  
**Fifth Sunday in Lent, 3<sup>rd</sup> Scrutiny, March 20-21, 2021, Cycle A**

Our gospel passage from John about the raising of Lazarus is the perfect story for us to ponder over as we celebrate the last scrutiny with our catechumens and before we enter Holy Week with next Sunday. The Raising of Lazarus by Jesus really presents, in microcosm, that whole mystery we celebrate throughout Holy Week: that through, in and by Jesus, the Father destroys our chains of death forever. While the raising of Lazarus is only a resuscitation (for Lazarus has to die again) nonetheless, Lazarus, brought forth from the tomb by Jesus, is the foretaste of what Jesus will accomplish beyond all expectations on Easter – burst forth from the tomb leaving behind his burial clothes forever; for the Risen One will never have need of burial clothes again. The Good News is that we can taste this new life of Jesus now! The Power of Resurrection can pulse through us now. A story might help illustrate the present power of Jesus' Resurrection.

When Robert McAfee Brown was an army chaplain, he served on a troopship carrying 1,500 U.S. Marines from Japan to the United States for discharge. One day he was pleasantly surprised by a group who approached him and asked if he might organize a Bible study, which he gladly did. Near the end of the twelve day voyage, the group was reflecting on this narrative about Jesus and Lazarus. Afterward, a Marine came to him and said, "Everything in that chapter, about Lazarus being raised is pointing at me." He went on and explained that he had joined the Marines right out of college and was shipped out immediately to Japan. Bored and lonely he had gone out looking for trouble and found it – big bad trouble. No one knew what he had done except for God; nevertheless, he was guilt-ridden. He felt that, in a sense, he had killed himself and was dead as dead can be.

"However," said the young Marine," after reading this chapter – of Jesus raising Lazarus I have come alive again. I know that this resurrection of which Jesus spoke is real, here and now, for he has raised me from death to life."

During the lifespan of any human being, there is, of course, one conclusive and ultimate death. Everybody dies. But there are also many little and large experiences of dying along the way. There are the losses of friends and family whose absences create a dying in our hearts. There are the losses of oppressed and needy brothers and sisters throughout the world whose deaths continue to assault the consciences of those more fortunate. There is the dying of a friendship as it is surrendered to an argument that cannot or will not be resolved. There are the deaths as the distances between us grow larger and our times of communion less frequent. There are the inevitable deaths when memory fails, when bones break and muscles ache with the loss of youthful vigor. There are also deaths that come with the loss of a job or a home. We are all certainly like the young marine and experience spiritual death in our sins, sensing the need to be raised to new life.

In all of these daily experiences of death, believers are assured that these deaths are but prelude to that final act of surrender to God. Each little death helps us prepare for the moment that is not as end but a passage to a new and endless beginning. In that final moment, and in all the little preludes of dying that lead up to that moment, Jesus will say to us as he said so long ago at the tomb of Lazarus, "Come out! Unbind him and let him go free!"

For in Jesus we have life! Even in the midst of mourning for our human condition of dying and death, our hearts can be full of hope – filled with joy! With this Sunday we will have now prayed over our catechumens three times, pleading that God free them from all that binds them to death. Only by, with, and through Jesus are we freed from being bound to death. We pray that our elect when they go down into the waters of baptism with Jesus on Easter they will rise to new life, leaving behind their burial clothes forever.