

016 5th Sunday of Lent A

Lazarus, Come Out!

As this Gospel was read, did you feel an affinity with one of the characters. For me it is Lazarus, and I find myself wondering: Was Lazarus happy when he heard Jesus calling to him to come out of the cave? That may sound like a ridiculous question and perhaps it is. But it's my question.

I think there is a natural tendency in some human beings (perhaps mainly introverts like myself) to build a cave – to create a space where we feel comfortable and safe, and not too disturbed by the outside world. That is not necessarily a bad thing: Jesus was happy to leave Lazarus in his cave for four days, and he himself was in the tomb for three days before rising. When I was in the United States, in a very busy community, I would designate some Saturdays as cave days, and I would stay in my room for most of the day. The previous day I would always tell the key people I'm having a cave day, so not to worry when I didn't come for meals, etc.

So, having a cave is not necessarily bad but we cannot stay in the cave forever. At a certain moment like Lazarus we have to exit the cave and engage the world, make our contribution to it.

Perhaps one reason why we don't want to come out of the cave is that, like Lazarus, we are all bound up and cannot unbind ourselves. We want to be free in the very best sense of Christian freedom, but we find that we are bound up by past experiences, current troubles, and so on, and cannot be as free as we would wish. We need someone to unbind us.

Perhaps you relate more to the person of Mary in this Gospel. Jesus arrives and she chooses not to go out to meet him. She needed Martha to come in and say to her, 'The master is here, and he wants to see you.' When Mary goes to him, all she can say is, 'If you were here my brother would not have died.' The unspoken question is, 'Why didn't you come when we called for you?' Jesus doesn't answer her question with words. He weeps for her.

Is that your point of entry into this story? Maybe you need someone to say to you, 'Jesus is here and he wants to see you.' Perhaps you need to know that even if your prayer isn't answered, for whatever reason, that Jesus weeps for you in your pain. He feels your sorrow; he is full of compassion for you.

Or perhaps your issues at this moment revolve around faith – faith in Jesus Christ and in the resurrection. Perhaps like Martha you need to hear Jesus say: 'I am the resurrection and the life. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies, will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' Give you answer to him, as Martha did? He wants to hear it.

So in this Gospel, are you Martha, Mary or Lazarus? This Gospel is proclaimed today, not because it tells of an encounter between Jesus and a family 2000 years ago. It is proclaimed today because it is your story and it is my story. Hopefully, by finding ourselves in it, we too can engage with Jesus in our unique way, as Martha, Mary and Lazarus did.

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