



Praying the Scripture - a few simple steps at home

Sunday 29th March 2020

1. Start with stillness and quietening down; then gently read the passage, noticing any feelings and connections to your own experience.
2. Read the passage again and spend understanding. *The notes in your Bible may be of help at this point.*
3. Read the passage a third time - wondering how you yourself might pray the text over the next few days.
4. Over the next week, set aside times to come back more than once to the passage. You could read it all or part of it again, slowly. Perhaps there is a special word for you in this passage of Scripture? Keep this word or phrase in your thoughts and gently repeat it, bringing it to mind and allowing God to speak to you in your heart.
5. Finally, come back to the text to conclude: What is God in this scripture asking of you this week? What is the one challenge, one little change you are asked to make or the thing you have been asked to do? Then say a prayer of thanksgiving for the good news in the passage. End in quiet prayer.



A little pointer before you begin –

This is a Lent of Long Gospels – When taking a gospel story for prayer, it is often helpful to break the story up into its individual sections. Each section represents a movement, an interaction between the characters. This is particularly true of a long story such as the one we have today. There are three main scenes in this story. Any one of them could be the focal point for your prayer. Try to identify the movement in the section you take for prayer. The objective is to discover the Good News in the story. The Good News is that the story of grace is deeper than the story of sin, both in the gospels and in our lives. One should also note the different characters in the story, for each of them could be a character with whom you can identify. In this story we have Jesus, Lazarus, Martha, Mary, the disciples, Thomas and 'the Jews'.

THIS SUNDAY'S GOSPEL – John 11:1-45

'The resurrection of Lazarus'

1-16: There was a man named Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister, Martha, and he was ill. It was the same Mary, the sister of the sick man Lazarus, who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped His feet with her hair. The sisters sent this message to Jesus: 'Lord, the man you love is ill.' On receiving the message, Jesus said, 'This sickness will not end in death, but it is for God's glory so that through it the Son of God may be glorified.' Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when He heard that he was ill He stayed where He was for two more days before saying to the disciples, 'Let us go back to Judaea.' The disciples said, 'Rabbi, it is not long since the Jews were trying to stone You; are You going back there again?' Jesus replied, 'Are there not twelve hours in the day? No one who walks in the daytime stumbles, having the light of this world to see by; anyone who walks around at night stumbles, having no light as a guide.' He said that and then added, 'Our friend Lazarus is at rest; I am going to wake him.' The disciples said to Him, 'Lord, if he is at rest he will be saved.' Jesus was speaking of the death of Lazarus, but they thought that by 'rest' he meant 'sleep'; so Jesus put it plainly, 'Lazarus is dead; and for your sake I am glad I was not there because now you will believe. But let us go to him.' Then Thomas -- known as the Twin -- said to the other disciples, 'Let us also go to die with Him.'

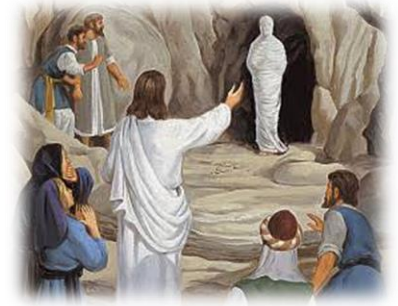
17-31: On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming she went to meet Him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died, but even now I know that God will grant whatever You ask of Him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said, 'I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection. Anyone who believes in Me, even though that person dies, will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' 'Yes, Lord,' she said, 'I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.' When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in a low voice, 'The Master is here and wants to see you.' Hearing this, Mary got up quickly and went to Him. Jesus had not yet come into the village; He was still at the place where Martha had met Him. When the Jews who were in the house comforting Mary saw her get up so quickly and go out, they followed her, thinking that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

32-45: Mary went to Jesus, and as soon as she saw Him she threw herself at His feet, saying, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.' At the sight of her tears, and those of the Jews who had come with her, Jesus

was greatly distressed, and with a profound sigh He said, 'Where have you put him?' They said, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus wept; and the Jews said, 'See how much He loved him!' But there were some who remarked, 'He opened the eyes of the blind man. Could he not have prevented this man's death?' Sighing again, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, 'Take the stone away.' Martha, the dead man's sister, said to Him, 'Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day since he died.' Jesus replied, 'Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?' So they took the stone away. Then Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, 'Father, I thank You for hearing my prayer. I myself knew that You hear me always, but I speak for the sake of all these who are standing around Me, so that they may believe it was You who sent Me. When He had said this, He cried in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with strips of material, and a cloth over his face. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, let him go free.' Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what he did, believed in Him.

A Short Thought

'Come out, ...Unbind him, and let him go...' The raising of Lazarus is one of the most important stories in our Faith. It is a call to acceptance, empowerment and justice. It is the greatest of the 'signs' and the turning point of the Gospel of John. In our times, Jesus' demand 'Come Out' is a powerful challenge to us. Come out of death, shame, destruction, come out of being an apathetic Christian: this is the call of God. For as Jesus says to Lazarus, you matter. You are a child of God, you are special. God cares and loves you just the way you are, and always has time. So in these challenging times how can you best person you can be? How can you reach out, support and be there for those who are alone, most vulnerable and forgotten in our community?



SOME POINTERS FOR PRAYER

- What part of this text touched, disturbed me or inspired me the most? Why?
- Martha speaks profound sorrow at the death of Lazarus, but it is tinged with blaming Jesus: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Where do I resent the losses in my life and somehow blame God for them?
- Even when Jesus tells Martha, "I am the one who raises the dead to life!" she finds it hard to believe. Where/when do I doubt that Jesus can bring life?
- Jesus stands before the tomb weeping. He places no barriers to his feelings about death. Can I be with him there? Can I stand before and face the tombs in my daily life?
- Jesus shouts the liberating words of life, "Lazarus, come forth!" How is he shouting that to me today?

Prayer

Jesus, present to us always, you wept at the tomb of your friend Lazarus. As we face the mystery of death, our own and that of those we love, help us to place our trust in you, the resurrection and the life. I ask this through Christ and Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, holy and mighty God for ever and ever. **Amen**

Prayer in these uncertain times

We pray for all those in our country and throughout the world suffering from the Corona Virus. May its victims and their families be strengthened by the support of our community of faith and restored soon to full health. We also pray for our leaders and medical personnel who deal with the virus. May we keep calm and may we join together in solidarity with care and compassion to tackle this emergency. This we ask in confidence through Christ Our Lord. Amen