

# ***Resurrection and Life***

## ***Fifth Sunday in Lent***

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# **Sunday, March 26, 2023**

We continue this morning in the Gospel of John, and our new witnesses are Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha. Not only does John call these witnesses as part of his demonstration of Jesus' divinity, but he also challenges some misconceptions about Jesus and the things of the kingdom. Let's do a recap of the previous witnesses.

John had called Nicodemus, who had to change his understanding of entrance into the kingdom. It did not come through study or learning but through a process, which could best be described as birth from above; the mysterious activity of the Holy Spirit.

The Woman at the Well needed clarification about worship. She was trying to find God in a particular place. Was he on this mountain or in Jerusalem? No, says Jesus - He is not in a place - He is in Spirit and in Truth, and that is where the true worshipper will find him.

People for whom there was confusion about worthiness surrounded the man who was born blind. They were blind because they could not ignore their prejudices to see the absolute truth. The Pharisees could not accept that he could be healed because he was a sinner, and Jesus' actions on the Sabbath meant he could not be of God. The contradictions of the evidence were no barrier to their theology.

Mary, Martha and Lazarus were Jesus' friends - surely, they understood. But our narrator tells us something different. When Lazarus became sick, they sent for Jesus the Physician. And when he died, they gave up. They had absolute confidence in the fact that Jesus could heal Lazarus. Consider the words each woman spoke when he arrived:

*Verse 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now, I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him."*

*Verse 32 When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."*

Lord, if you had been here - he would not have died. Jesus was the healer, but he wished to show himself as more. He desired to lift their faith to a new plain: from being the healer to being the life-giver.

Our story is framed so that there is little doubt to the Jewish listener that Lazarus was dead. After four days, the body would begin to decay. This was impossible. Jesus had raised the dead before - the widow's son at Nain and the daughter of the synagogue's official at Capernaum but they were at the point of death. Here is something new. Not only the restoration of life but of body. Not resuscitation, but resurrection.

It was not enough for the friends of Jesus to be his friend. There must be the recognition of his Divinity - his giving of life. It is an inadequate approach when we sell Christianity as being Jesus' friend - recognition of his divinity is the essence of faith that leads to eternal life.

So let us bring this to the present. How are you and I limited in our understanding of Jesus? Are we, like Nicodemus, caught up in the religious structures without the

experience of this new birth? Is our faith that of the head and not of the heart? Or do we know the Joy of Birth from above?

Or do we stand with the Woman at the Well? Have we limited God to this place or this church? Have we compartmentalised our faith? Or is our experience of God in Spirit and in Truth?

Or are we caught up in our prejudices like the Pharisees who could not accept the healing of Jesus as being from God? Have we limited God by our own thinking? Or are we open to discovering him in Spirit and Truth?

Or are we like Mary and Martha, happy to have Jesus as a friend but not more? Or is our faith in Jesus, the life-giver, the divine one?

John's witnesses point us to Jesus and warn us of the obstacles to a whole experience of faith. In as much as Lent is a time of reflection and reassessment, our Gospels challenge us to look at the very basis of our faith.

Let us take a moment now to reflect on these things. John Michael Talbot is a Franciscan with considerable talent in music. His music is both challenging and uplifting. Let us take a moment to listen to his "I am the Resurrection". The words are there to help you follow, and in this time, take the opportunity to remind ourselves of the meaning of this phrase.

**AMEN**