

Reflecting
on the fifth Sunday in Lent



Archdiocese of
Liverpool

Prepare to be attentive to *The God Who Speaks in this story.*



- Light a candle or tea light if possible.
- Perhaps place some leaves or a flower from the garden next to the light.

Begin by praying this prayer requested by Archbishop Malcolm:



God Our Father,
each person is precious to You.
You are the Giver of life.
Have mercy on us and protect us at this time,
as the coronavirus threatens health and life.
You are an ever-present Helper in time of trouble.
Watch over those who are suffering,
give strength to those who are aiding the sick
and give courage to all in this time of anxiety.
We ask this of you in the name of your Son.
Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Now, breathe deeply and allow yourself to become still.



Let the music, *May the peace of God be with us*, help you to relax. [© Joanne Wallace 2020.]

Ask for God's grace and light to fill your heart and your mind as you open to the Word.



Spend some time just looking at the three images.

- Where is your eye drawn to?
- What feelings are you experiencing?
- What are you noticing?





Pray the Responsorial Psalm, *With the Lord, There is Mercy* by Marty Haughen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rmZQ-UV9cM>

With the Lord, there is mercy and fullness of redemption.

From out of the depths, I cry unto you.
Lord, hear my voice; come hear my prayer;
Oh let your ear be open to my pleading.

If you, O Lord, should mark our guilt,
then who could stand within your sight?
But in you is found forgiveness for our failings.

Just as those who wait for the morning light,
even more I long for the Lord, my God,
and his word to me shall ever be my comfort.

Now, either read slowly to yourself the story below or better still, read it aloud, again slowly.

From the Gospel according to John 11: 1 – 45



Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 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.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 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.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.'



Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent

me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Now visit the part of the story that seems to be most important for you.

Read this part a second time, aloud if possible, and allow it to nourish you before reading Fr Chris Thomas' reflection...



My Dad was 48 when I was born and was the product of a respectable working-class family, living in Fairfield in Liverpool. Dad had always been the rebel of that family and ran away to sea when he was 14. He hoped to make a career in the navy, but his eyesight wasn't good enough. After the Second World War he returned to England to find his mother had died, his father had given up the family home and gone to live with his sister. That meant life was very different than it had been before the war. A lot of his friends had died in the war and those who were left hadn't had his experiences and so in many ways he was unable to connect with them. I guess a lot of people come back from war with that sort of experience. He was a sad, disillusioned man who drifted from job to job and into marriage with Mum. Life hadn't turned out as he hoped, and his bitterness and sadness led him to alcoholism and a life in which he buried himself in a tomb of pain and brokenness.

Many years ago, when I was reading the story of Lazarus a friend of mine asked me, 'what tombs have you placed yourself in?' I think it was then that I realised that the story of Lazarus is all of our stories. It can be about the death of our hopes and our dreams. It can be about the death of our innocence and our trust. Just as we find physical death difficult to face so we find the inner death from these things that we go through, difficult to face. That can lead us to lock ourselves up in tombs of bitterness and anger and frustration, tombs of false images of God and of ourselves, tombs of those things in our lives that hurt us and make us shy away from people never willing to trust or to be open. Sometimes the tombs are not of our own making. All over the world at the moment people are living in fear of COVID-19. I sometimes wonder if the pandemic of fear that surrounds it, isn't as bad, if not worse than the virus itself. All of it kills us within.

Yet, what's in the heart of God for us, is life. And so, we find Jesus praying for life outside Lazarus' tomb, culminating in the great cry which must have shaken the bowels of hell "Lazarus, here, come out." It's a cry for all who are dead within to walk to new life. That's sometimes a hard thing to do, to walk out of the tombs that we've lived in. They're secure and comfortable but transformation never happens without a bit of effort on our part. It never happens without the willingness to walk out into the light in response to the call. Lazarus had to walk out of the tomb. We have to do the same, trusting God and, in the light, to become what we can become.

I often think that the real transformation that has to take place within us, is in the realm of our image of God. I think the story of Lazarus invites us to let go of any image of God that would see God as anything but

loving and life giving. It is only then that we will trust God to call us into life. God isn't petty and out for revenge as we are. God is not trying to find ways of punishing us or making us pay for the things we do wrong. God is not like us. God wants nothing from you in return for loving you. Everything's gift. The invitation is to trust that God, with the tombs that we've placed ourselves in and to hear the call to be free.



Read through the poem written by Andrea Skevington.

Mary, sister of Lazarus, at your feet a second time.

She sits in the shuttered room,
the room where her brother had laid,
dying, dead, the messengers sent out
returning empty, with no reply,
like prayers that bounce off ceilings
or stick to the roof of the mouth,
choking with sorrow.

When you stay by the Jordan
that shuttered room is where Mary stays.
This is her shadowed valley, the dark forest of her path,
foreshadowing yours, it is all foreshadowing you.
The room where her brother had laid,
how can she ever leave it now?
But leave she did, at last, when you called for her,
she came quickly, running, trailing darkness behind
her weeping. Mary, once more at your feet,
and when you saw her weeping, you wept too.

You know us in our grief. You come to us, call to us.
In our darkest, most shuttered places,
your spirit moves, breaks with ours.
Death lay heavy upon you, too, and all the sooner for
this, what you do now, standing before that tomb.

For now, you who are Life,
Word made warm and beating flesh,
and weeping,
call Lazarus out,
You, who are life, and will rise,
call out one who is dead from the cold tomb.

You watch as they run to free him from the
graveclothes,
pull darkness from him,
calling in strange bewildered delight,
and you see Mary's face as she sees now,
her brother, who was dead, once more in light,
astonished, seeing your glory, part of your glory,
as she weeps again, is weeping again
breathless with joy.





As a result of your reflection, offer some prayers of intercession for the people and situations in our world today that seem to you to be most in need.

Our Father,
who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.



To end your time of reflection, listen to *I am the Resurrection* by John Michael Talbot.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijtZaUHn_M0

*I am the Resurrection, I am Eternal Life.
All who believe in me will never die.
I am the Resurrection, Eternal Life.
All who believe will live forever.*

I am the Resurrection and the Life
and I ask you now, do you believe in me?
I am the Son of God, the living Christ,
who lays down his life for the world.

You should not be surprised
when all the world despises you,
for the world despised the Son of God
and he has been raised up.