

WEEPING AT ANOTHER'S DEATH: 5TH SUNDAY OF LENT (A)

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'Jesus weeps' with sadness at the death of his friend. He does not hide his tears. But then he calls out: *'Take the stone away.'* *'Lazarus ... come out.'* *'Unbind Lazarus, and let him go free.'* Clearly Jesus is the Master of life and death, *'the resurrection and the life'*.

Death comes in many forms other than our final exit. We may feel that we have lost our grip on life, that we are broken, defeated and destroyed. A kind of death may happen to us if or when we find ourselves suffering grief, hurt, illness, shame, humiliation, separation, or the end of our marriage. The dreadful experience, whatever form it takes, may even leave us feeling that we have no energy, no future, and nothing left to live for.

It's not difficult to see Lazarus as a symbol for us all. Perhaps many of us have felt at times that we too have ended up in a tomb! Dead and buried! Cut off from life and the joys of life! Languishing in some cold dark place! Helpless, frustrated, bound up, and falling apart! Feeling too that some huge boulder is blocking our path back to light, life, and freedom! A boulder too heavy for us to roll away on our own!

A particularly virulent form of living death is the disease of alcoholism. It not only destroys the living physical organs of the patient, but destroys their world of meaning and relationships as well. This has come home to me vividly in recent years when I was offering support to someone who is a recovering alcoholic. One of the things he told me that will always stay with me is that until he finally turned to the AA programme of recovery, he had been slowly but surely committing suicide.

Whatever form living death may take in our lives, we rarely recover without a great deal of help from other people, help which includes friendship every bit as much as professional therapy. This is where we all come into the lives of others. This is where we act like Jesus himself when he intervenes in the death of Lazarus, and in the grief of Martha and Mary! This is where we help the ones we love and the ones we befriend, to get up from their living death, rise to new life, and get moving again.

So it's a matter of being on the ready to be *'Godsends'*, in fact agents and instruments of the Holy Spirit, to anyone who may need us. It's a matter of being sensitive to, being responsible for, and being compassionate towards. It's a matter of caring enough, reaching out to, and being there for. It's a matter of believing in, hoping that, and supporting the struggling and stumbling ones, to get back on track and rediscover that life is worth living after all, and that they still have a lot of living to do.

Jesus wept at the loss of his dear friend Lazarus. So must we weep at the plight of people who mean much to us. For the sensitivity that you and I need, then, to become aware when a sister or brother is close to breaking-point, and for the courage, compassion and generosity to step in and offer our assistance before it's too late, let us keep praying to the Lord...

We cannot belong to Jesus without weeping with him at the tombs of our fellow human beings, and calling them out of those tombs into the light and love of God's embrace. An alternative Opening Prayer today of our celebration of Christ, our resurrection and our life, spells out beautifully what our communion with him and one another leads us to do and to be:

'Father ...,' we pray, 'the love of your Son led him to accept the suffering of the cross in order that his brothers and sisters might glory in new life. Change our selfishness into self-giving. Help us to embrace the world which you have given us, that we may transform the darkness of its pain into the life and joy of Easter.'

When the much loved Pope John XXIII was dying he pointed to the crucifix near his bed and told those standing around him that it was those open arms of Jesus crucified that inspired his whole programme of life and work.

What an inspiration it is to you and me as well, to take our cue from Jesus, not only weeping at the death and loss of his close friend, but doing all he could to change death into life, darkness into light, and sadness into joy!