

[Readings: Ezekiel 37:12-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:8-11; John 11:1-45]

Are you feeling "dead on your feet?" So did the Jewish people in the time of the prophet of our First Reading, Ezekiel. So did the people listening to Paul in today's Second Reading. So did Martha, Mary, and Lazarus in our Gospel.

Those who had appeared banished from the land of the living would be called forth from their graves of slavery and bondage of the Babylonian captivity, and each would begin to live again the life that seemed lost forever. John does not tell us in today's Gospel if the restoration of Lazarus from death to life brought an awakening of faith in the people witnessing this miracle. For some, it did.

Some interpret this Gospel not as the literal resuscitation of Lazarus, but of the spiritual re-awakening of the Jewish people who were lagging in their faith. I myself felt this story was a test of my own faith. If Jesus Christ is believed to be the first-fruit to be raised from the dead, why is Jesus raising people left and right? The answer: We need to remember that these people who are resuscitated to their prior life-source will die again: the widow's son, Jairus' daughter, Lazarus. Jesus Christ, once Risen from the dead in glory, will never die again. THAT'S the difference! And WHAT a difference that is!

So, are you "dead on your feet?" Are you feeling indifferent, or bored or lazy or in doubt? Do you find yourself being swept away by "fleshly" ways of thinking? One that is shaped and controlled by the values and standards of a world in rebellion against God? Then you're still in the tomb! A "spirited" existence is one that is surrendered to God, to grace, and to the action of the Spirit of God who dwells within. Have you found that power, that grace yet?

"Our friend," Jesus called him (Jn 11:11).

That's what Lazarus was; it's why Jesus came to him, why He raised him from the dead. Because Lazarus was Jesus' friend. Even the bystanders could see it on His face; they said to one another, "See how He loved him" (Jn 11:36). Love and friendship are at work underneath this and, in fact, every miracle. And really, that's the point — the simplest point, at least — that Lazarus is us, or should be. As goes Lazarus, so should we.

We should be [friends with Jesus](#) just like he was. For that's what this Christianity thing is all about: becoming God's friend, finding life in that friendship, even eternal life.

What Jesus did for Lazarus is just what he said He'd do. Earlier in John, he said, "Do not be amazed at this, because the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation" (Jn 5:28-29).

He was, of course, speaking generally here; Lazarus, however, is a sign, a miraculous signal of what is true for all believers. What happened to Lazarus was a glimpse of glory. He said so explicitly: "This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (Jn 11:4).

Just as at Cana, or with the Samaritan woman at the well, or the blind man at the pool of Siloam, the miracle of Lazarus was a sign too, also revealing His glory (cf. Jn 2:11). By these signs, many came to believe; that was the point of these miracles. This too is one of the more beautiful points of the story, that God sometimes reveals His glory through the miracles He's wrought in us, that God can change others through us, through our miraculously changed lives. So long, of course, as we're God's real friends.

To be God's friend requires belief — right belief; in fact, orthodoxy. That's the importance of Jesus' [exchange with Martha](#). "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Jesus challenges her. She answers, "Yes, Lord, I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world" (Jn 11:25-27).

So, in what ways are you and I still "dead on our feet?" What are some ways that we are still "bound" by sin and need to be set free? What are some wrappings others have put on us? What are the wrappings of habitual sin we have put on ourselves? Are WE ready to step out of the tomb and into the light?

The point here is that real friendship with God demands real belief. If you don't believe in the Gospel, you are no Catholic and no friend of God, nor will the

glory Jesus talked about ever shine through you; it will neither change you nor save you.

This sounds hard, but this story, we remember, takes place at a tomb. The matter and moral of the story is, indeed, life and [death](#). That's why we need to be clear about what friendship with God entails, because the stakes are high. This is the sort of faith the Church wants us to rekindle these final days of Lent before entering the week of Christ's passion. Ours is a primitive but modern faith; we remain enchanted believers in love and friendship and even miracles.

Our faith should be no different from those first witnesses to Jesus' signs. Our faith is purified, of course, by spiritual understanding. We know, for example, why Lazarus kept his burial clothes, and why, unlike Jesus, he didn't neatly fold them up and leave them in the tomb (cf. Jn 11:44; 20:6-7). Lazarus would need them again; he would one day die physically, as all do.

We know that what Jesus gives us is eternal life, heaven; we know that that's what this story is ultimately about. Just before they witness His own death, Jesus wants His believers to have real faith, real hope and real love. Again, all of this is about friendship. Friends understand, friends keep faith, and that's all Jesus wants — friends who'll go with Him to the cross, who'll not lose faith.

As we know, most who were there to see Lazarus raised, scattered at Jesus' arrest. Few made it all the way to see what happened on the [cross](#). What about us? Will we make it to Good Friday as faithful friends of Jesus? Will we witness His death with understanding? Will we see in His death the revelation of God and the work of our redemption? These are the questions the Church gives us just before Holy Week. Questions only the real friends of God know how to answer.

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