

St Pius & St Anthony 5th Sunday Lent Homily 2026 Year A John 11:1-45

I remember the first deer I hit on the road (or rather it hit me). I was in the seminary and I volunteered in a local parish (St Augustine Parish, Leopold, IN) teaching their confirmation class. On my way there, one Wednesday evening, about dark, I topped a hill and there ran a deer in front of me (*I hadn't heard yet about 'if you see one, slow down, another is coming-they run in groups'*). So, as I start down the hill, another comes charging toward the road and sure enough, "BAM" he runs into my passenger side door, and I look in the rear view and see a crumpled deer in road! I don't know if I had ever even ran over a live animal yet? So, I pull on to the shoulder of this country highway, as best I can and put flashers on – I guess I figured "What should I do-I don't want to cause a wreck – with this obstacle in the middle of road?" As I am wondering whether I should walk back toward the dead deer and pull it off roadway, a man stops behind me also. I was telling him about the deer running out and hitting me, and he asks, "Is it dead?" I don't know – it just happened – it looks dead. So he tells me, "You need to kill it-you got a gun?" Remember I am a seminarian – I am not packing a sidearm. I don't say anything, but I'm thinking, "What am I supposed to do? I have a tire tool, am I supposed to go bludgeon to death the deer?" He says again, "We need to know if it's dead." At this time I think, if I walk up to it and its not dead-is it going to start kickboxing me with its long legs? About then, I hear the leaves rustling in the woods next to us, where I figure the other deer is coming back to check on its running mate, and I begin to think I am going to be charged by an outraged partner coming back to avenge its partner's death. So, what am I supposed to do? About this time, I think I see movement, and sure enough, the deer pile laying in the road looks to be moving, the leg brushing the road and it seems to rock on the ground a minute, and then yes, the deer head rises, and its whole body mounts up again, before standing in the road to let a victory picture be taken and then he darts off into the woods the same direction it was going earlier. He must have just knocked himself out – heading into the side of my truck.

Why do I share that? Because the question was, "Is it really dead or not?" It wasn't any resurrection, the deer was just knocked out – not dead. And such a question might have been asked about Lazarus and his resurrection or not? Was Lazarus really dead, or just in a deep coma – was he like the stories we hear sometimes of a 'supposed' cadaver in the morgue hallway who starts to rustle under the sheet – maybe due to undiscoverable pulse and they were mistakenly declared dead. Some people discredited Lazarus' resurrection by claiming the

same thing – he wasn't really dead. But the several days delay of this miracle further testifies to the authenticity of the miracle (detail of 'surely a stench by now')

Realizing that question (is he dead or not?), helps us pull together several other details that otherwise, might trouble us. So, let's explore, what is behind Jesus' seemingly inconsiderate **delay of two days**, after he learns of Lazarus' severe sickness? Couldn't they have rushed on to Lazarus' bedside to perform his healing --Or it wasn't unheard of that Jesus performed a long-distance healing (such as in Mt 8:5-13-Lk 7:1-10 where Jesus heals a centurion's servant, and in Jn 4:46-54 when he heals a nobleman's son by simply 'saying the word' from a distance!) So, what is behind Jesus' delay? Well, a couple of reasons – one is related to symbolic timing – John loves sevens (7 'I am' sayings, 7 miracles, 7 witness-disciples named at Jesus' post-Easter seaside appearance, 7 feasts mentioned & 7 questions answered-recall that I pointed out two weeks ago that Jesus was the seventh & most significant man in the Woman at the Well's life in Jn 4). So, if Lazarus happened to die very shortly after the messenger was sent to inform Jesus of the critical illness, and the journey was two days of walking, it could break down to adding 2 days to get the word to him, plus Jesus' two day delay, and then plus their two day walk (up to 6), to bring them to arriving to perform the resurrection on the 7th day (or view it this way, of the 'two day delay' mentioned in 11:6 and the four days Lazarus is in tomb mentioned in 11:39, to mark their arrival after the 6th, or beginning the 7th day!) But, Jesus is aware of this extra emotional stress and anxiety that the question 'Why the wait?' produced in both Martha and Mary and which is reflected in their identical statement of discouragement, to Jesus "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died?" (11:21,32). I think that accounts for the extreme emotion even Jesus exhibits in this episode – His being 'perturbed' which is better translated 'deeply moved-stirred' as in the word 'turbulence' or emotional jostling, and even Him weeping Himself-'if it could have gone another way – great- but it couldn't'. Why? Jesus Himself addressed this early on, by saying, "**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). This amounts to Jesus saying that 'things just happen in this world- it's not perfect- this world is broken-like us' But Jesus adds, that still God can work good out of the bad things that afflict us. God in no way is the cause of the bad, it is just the result of the contingency (finiteness) of world, but after the fact, God can still work good, or greater good, to come from the bad (*bad things just happen-but good people respond with better*). And what comes of Lazarus' sickness unto death, but we hear that Jesus performs greatest (&7th miracle in Jn) miracle of resurrection, and 'many people came to believe in Jesus' (11:45 & 12:9) because of this greater miracle. And this 'greater good' theme was also reflected in both previous Sunday

readings – the man born blind, who when people wanted to condemn him, judging his blindness to be the result of his sin- Jesus responds, ‘No, blindness just happens’-and his blindness with its healing, is **“so that the works of God might be made visible through him”**(Jn 9:3). And, how about the long suffering emotional anguish of the woman at the well’s history of pain over failed relationships? These things happen too– but God can draw good from them for others, as we see when she ‘witnesses’ and brings many people to Jesus through her testimony (‘He told me everything I’ve done’ Jn 4:39). **Many Samaritans came to Jesus over her experience and conversion witness.** God didn’t cause any of this suffering, but God answers and comes to heal/forgive, open our eyes and raise us up to new life by His response to our bad experience. And Lazarus is one more example, of God answering (maybe not according to our timetable expectations) but through our patience and trust, He will bring new life and meaning to our suffering and even death. Lazarus, Martha and Mary teach us to seek God’s greater purpose and meaning behind our life’s pain, suffering or loss. God can bring us to life again. God can redeem our grief by loving us through and raising us up after life’s hurts. He is the ‘resurrection and life’. With Him, we find release and new life.

Some Examples of Sevens in John

Seven Miracles (signs)

Turns water to wine (John 2:1-11)
Heals a Royal official’s son (John 4:43-54)
Heals a disabled man at Bethesda pool (John 5:1-47)
Feeds ~20,000 people (John 6:1-15)
Walks on Water (John 6:16-24)
Heals a blind man (John 9 & 10)
Resurrects Lazarus (John 11:1-57)

Seven ‘I am’s

I am the bread of life (6:35, 48, 51)
I am the light of the world (8:12; 9:5)
I am the door of the sheep (10:7, 9)
I am the good shepherd (10:11, 14)
I am the resurrection and the life (11:25)
I am the way, the truth, and the life (14:6)
I am the true vine (15:1)

Seven Witnesses to Resurrected Jesus

John 21:2 “Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee’s sons, and two others of his disciples.”