

Think for a moment about the message Martha and Mary sent to Jesus. Tradition tells us that Martha, Mary and Lazarus were fairly well off. They were among a number of people that supported Jesus in His ministry, and they were His close friends.

So the messengers that came to Jesus today were most likely servants who had been given a very specific message to give to Jesus. "Master, the one you love is ill."

They did not say, "Master, the one who loves you is ill," or "Master, come and heal Lazarus."

Instead, Martha and Mary sent a very carefully worded prayer. "Master, the one you love is ill." How could the Sacred Heart of Jesus not be moved by such a plea? It is a message that expresses total, complete, confidence in Him.

And what is Jesus' response? He doesn't rush back to Jerusalem to save Lazarus. He does not heal him from a distance as He did with the Centurion's son. Instead He waits, for two days, allowing Martha and Mary, friends whom He loves, to suffer.

Jesus allows them to experience the pain and heartache of losing a loved one precisely because He loved them.

If God protected us from all suffering then we would make the mistake of thinking of earth as Heaven. A place in which we could make ourselves happy purely by our own efforts. But we live in a fallen world and suffering is inevitable. God allows us to experience that suffering to

remind us that life on earth is a journey towards Heaven – it's the path, not the goal. Heaven is the goal and the resurrection of Lazarus is a taste of Heaven.

What matters in this life is not that we are perfectly comfortable, with all of our desires satisfied. What matters in this life is knowing, loving, and following Jesus Christ.

Jesus uses our sufferings to help us do that. Our sufferings remind us that we are not God. Our sufferings inspire us to turn to Him more and more. The sufferings we undergo are opportunities for God to reveal Himself to us more completely, just as He did with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.

God is showing us that His Providence is more powerful than even life's greatest tragedies. Jesus goes out of His way to show us that God can bring good out of evil.

Lazarus was dead, but Jesus calls his name and orders him to come out, which he does. Death itself must obey the Word of the Lord.

Imagine the reaction of the crowd gathered around. First they saw Jesus come to the tomb and weep with Martha and Mary. They shook their heads in sympathy, saying to each other “see how He loved him.”

But their sympathy must have turned to confusion and mockery when Jesus ordered the stone removed from the tomb and began to pray.

Put yourself in that moment between Jesus calling Lazarus and Lazarus coming out of the tomb.

The people had already seen Jesus perform miracles so they were not quite sure what to expect. It must have been one of those moments, when in spite of the crowd, you could hear a pin drop. Then Lazarus appears and the crowd is awestruck, wide eyed with disbelief as they saw a man whom they all new to be dead, restored to life.

The silence is shattered by a storm of joy and celebration. Martha and Mary aren't sure who to hug first, their brother or their Lord.

The resurrection of Lazarus is proof of God's power and love, proof that when God allows us to suffer, it is for His greater purpose.

Do you think Lazarus was the same man after his resurrection? Did he just thank Jesus, and pick up his old life where he left off? No, he had to have been changed. He was dead for four days. It was commonly believed among the Jews that after death a soul lingers for three days and then returns to God to await the resurrection. Lazarus would have returned with the knowledge of what awaits us after death.

As a result he would have been much less concerned about the trials of this world. He would have had a better sense of how small his problems were in relation to God's ultimate power and goodness. He would have been much less self absorbed and more interested in the lives and needs of those around him.

This experience changed him so much that we are told later on in John's Gospel, "the chief priests planned to put Lazarus also to death, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus".

Jesus tells us that this miracle was not so much for the benefit of Lazarus but for all of us, that we might see the “glory of God.” Jesus performed this miracle to convince us of His goodness and power and to remind us that death in this world, is not the last word.

The existence of Heaven, of a life after this one, is central to our faith. If we did not believe this, then our sufferings would make no sense.

The theme of every Christian life is that we are immortal, that life here on earth is not the end, it is just the beginning, and that what we do here and now affects how we will live in the life to come. This worldview is reflected in how we respond to the tragedies and suffering we encounter in this life. Are we victims? Or are we pilgrims on the road to salvation?

This is the great secret of Christians. We are made in the image of God, we are intended for greater things, we are too much for this earth. And Our Lord shows us this by transforming death from a dead-end into a doorway to a world of happiness and joy.

This is the third week of what the Church calls the Scrutinies. The Scrutinies are directed towards our RCIA candidates. It is a time for them and for the community to assess their readiness to be fully received into the Church. During the Scrutinies we have alternate readings for the day. Two weeks ago we heard about the woman at the well, to remind us that God calls His scattered people together. The man born blind reminds us that God can heal all of our wounds and infirmities. The raising of Lazarus recalls to us that we are to follow Christ, even to death.

Thomas the Apostle understands this, although perhaps incompletely. “Let us also go to die with him,” he says.

There is a remarkable manuscript written over a thousand years ago in what is now part of north eastern Germany. It is called the Heliand and it is a retelling of the Gospel story for the people of Saxony. This is what an ancient bard might have sung to entertain a Saxon lord and his nobles.

In the Heliand Thomas and the apostles are warriors in service to their Lord. Resolved to return to Jerusalem with Jesus, Thomas says this. “Let us never reproach His deeds or His will. But rather we should remain with Him and suffer with Our Lord, because that is the choice of a disciple, that he stand together with his Lord and die with Him. Let us follow His path, for our lives are worth nothing unless we are willing to die with Our Lord. So our honor will live after us.”

Perhaps Thomas did have some dim understanding that death itself is nothing more than a promise of the Resurrection.

Jesus is preparing Himself for His upcoming passion and by these readings He prepares us as well. He bolsters our belief that He knows us and loves us and will carry us with Him through the bars of death to the freedom of Heaven.

The Scrutinies are a time for all of us to reflect upon the journey of the elect as a source of inspiration and renewal for our own journey. The scrutinies are a time for us to reflect upon the healing and strength offered to us through the support of our brothers and sisters.

*After this homily the elect will be called forward with their sponsors, and the entire community will be invited to pray for them. We pray that they may be freed from the power of the Evil One because those that have not yet been baptized are especially vulnerable to his attacks.*

*Then, before they are dismissed to reflect upon the Word, Father will call down the Spirit of Jesus to be with them and protect them.*

Our elect and our catechumens are entering a period of more intense spiritual preparation, and are in great need of our prayers.

The raising of Lazarus shows us how much God wants us to believe in Him and His Church. He wants us to live not just for earthly success and popularity, but for eternal life and eternal success for ourselves and for everyone around us, especially those that are just beginning the journey.

As our elect and catechumens *come forward, (continue their journey)* please take a moment to pray for them silently. God has called them to rejoin His family. Pray that God protect them and heal them, and that they, along with us, will share in the glories of the Resurrection.