

5th Sunday of Lent - A

I first arrived in Canada in 1988, full of pep and enthusiasm, to work in this beautiful and blessed Diocese of Calgary.

Eight months later, after my morning mass in St. Marks, my pastor standing at the doorway of my office, dropped his jaw and told me some shocking news: *"Someone called us from the Philippines informing us that your Dad just died this morning."*

Immediately I lost all contact with reality around me. My mind flashed back across the years.

First, I saw my strict Dad waking me up, while we as a family were praying the rosary before we slept at night. Next, I saw him as a reluctant father who did not want me to enter the seminary. He wanted me to carry on his name. I was the only boy in the family. Finally, I saw him as a loving father, feeling sad and gloomy at the airport, before I left the Philippines. He was 82 years old.

His death left me so shocked and stunned that I was unable to speak to my pastor. All I could think of was my Dad lying cold, lifeless and still.

I'd like to think that my story gives us an insight into how Jesus must have felt when he learned that Lazarus had died. He too was shocked and stunned.

Describing his reaction to the news, the Bible says, *"And Jesus wept."*

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This is the shortest verse in the Bible. It is just three words: *"And Jesus wept."* Yet it describes one of the most moving scenes in the Gospel.

And the reason it is so moving is that it gives us an insight into the humanity of Jesus. It gives us an insight into the vulnerability of Jesus.

We tend to forget that Jesus had a heart and loved, as we do.
We tend to forget that Jesus had emotions and cried, as we do.
We tend to forget that Jesus had a body and suffered, as we do.

- Why is it so important to remember these things about Jesus?
- Why is it so important to remember that Jesus loved, as we do?
- Why is it so important to remember that Jesus cried, as we do?
- Why is it so important to remember that Jesus suffered, as we do?

It's important because it makes it possible for us to relate to Jesus. He was like us in all things but sin.

Because Jesus loved, because He cried, because He suffered, He understands how we feel when we love, when we cry, when we suffered.

And just knowing that Jesus understands this inspires us to carry on when life gets hard or when tragedy strikes.

But today's gospel shows us something even more important about Jesus.

Besides showing Jesus weeping for Lazarus, it shows Jesus raising Lazarus to life.

In other words, besides showing us the humanity of Jesus, it shows us the divinity of Jesus.

It shows us that Jesus was not only human, like us, but also the Son of God, totally unlike us.

But today's gospel goes even further.

It shows Jesus making a remarkable promise to us. He says, *"Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live."*

In other words, Jesus will do for us something even greater than He did for Lazarus.

Lazarus eventually grew old and died. Jesus' gift to him was only a temporary gift of earthly life. But Jesus' gift to us is a permanent gift of eternal life.

Elsewhere in the Gospel Jesus says of this permanent gift:

"Just as the Father raised the dead and gives life, so also does the Son give life to whomever he wishes ... Just as the Father has life in himself, so also he gave to his Son the possession of life in himself." Jn. 5:2,

And so today's Gospel reading is a kind of capsule summary of the biblical message of salvation.

First, it tells us that Jesus was truly human. He had emotions, just as we do. He loved and cried, just as we do.

And because Jesus was truly human, we can relate to him and he can relate to us. He knows how we feel when we suffer and cry. And he will comfort and strengthen us in these moments.

Second, it tells us that Jesus is also truly divine. He is God's own Son. And because of this he possesses the power to do for us what no other person on earth can do. If we believe, he can give us the gift of eternal life.

And so, today's readings are a capsule summary of the biblical message of salvation: The Son of God became one of us that He might share with us the life of God.

Let's close by recalling Martha's response to Jesus' question:

"Whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Martha responded, "Yes, Lord! I do believe."

So let us pray:

Yes, Lord, we do believe that you are true God and true man.

Yes, Lord, we do believe that you became one of us that we might become one with you.

Yes, Lord, we do believe that in the world to come you will wipe all tears -like those you shed for Lazarus. Then there will be no more death, no more grief, and no more crying.

Yes, Lord, we do believe.