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*Fifth Sunday of Lent – Year A (March 29, 2020)*

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Praised be Jesus Christ!

The story of the raising of Lazarus (John 11) is close to the hearts of many people, myself included. I think this is because it has such a compelling cast of characters and such a dynamic arc of emotions. But above all, I think it is because, more than any other gospel story, it puts us in touch with Jesus' humanity. Here we really feel like we can relate to him. We hear about his personal friends, the people he liked to hang out with, and how he related to them. We see his individual interactions with Lazarus' sisters in a difficult situation, and we see Jesus cry in public. We feel really close to them all in this moment.

And yet, despite Christ's humanity on full display, we also have throughout this story the most impressive displays of his Divinity, as if to remind us that as much as we can make distinctions, we can in no way divide his humanity and Divinity. But for those who decided ahead of time that the two natures could not be in one person, these events became the pretext for the crucifixion. And indeed, starting today, the Church turns her gaze definitively towards the Cross. Throughout our journey with Jesus in Lent, he knew where he was going. But now we must know as well. The readings from now on refer more directly to this. Starting tomorrow, the Preface of the Holy Cross begins to be used at Mass. The images are covered. We starve our senses so that we know for the next two weeks nothing but Christ, and him crucified (1 Cor 2:2).

And we are not just metaphorically in darkness. We just had the new moon, marking the beginning of the first month of the Hebrew calendar. Passover comes in two weeks with the full moon, as we hear in the Easter Proclamation, quoting the psalms: "This is the night of which it is written: The night shall be as bright as day, dazzling is the night for me, and full of gladness." This business of light appears in today's gospel. Jesus says, "Are there not twelve hours in a day? If one walks during the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks at night, he stumbles because the light is not in him." It seems to have nothing to do with anything else he is saying. But remember what he said last week: "We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Only a chapter earlier, Jesus said, after saving the woman caught in adultery, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

What are we to make of all this talk of light and darkness, night and day? The point (although we can hardly limit ourselves to it) is that without Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5). He is a light to our reason so that we can judge things correctly. He is a light to our steps (Psalm 119:105) so that our wills do not fall into committing evil. The warmth of his rays fills our hearts with hope and gladness at the most difficult moments, as he gave hope to Martha, and gladness to all in returning life to Lazarus. Indeed, it is only by his light that we are to receive life, as Lazarus did.

What must this mean for us? All the usual things about doing good and avoiding evil, of course. But it puts into focus a critical point we must never forget: we judge all things by the measure of the thing we most wish to possess. In other words, we make all of our choices in light of the thing we care about most, because we want to make sure that nothing gets in the way of obtaining it. We just need to look at the things we desire and the choices we make to recognize this. Because of this principle, it is critical that we make our choices by the light of Christ—the light of faith, the light of life—rather than by some inferior light which is limited to this life. Why? Because if we make our choices only in accord with what is in this life, then we are really walking in darkness. Christ is the only true light. We can only make truly informed decisions when we recognize at every moment that our goal is not in the world. Our goal is eternal life in Christ, who is in heaven. We must learn by his light that death is better than sin.

If we can begin to think like this, we don't need to fear "falling behind" because God is with us, and he cares for us. We might be tempted to say, along with Martha and Mary, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died," or fill-in-the-blank with whatever misfortune we might suffer. But he *was* with us (after all, how many people had Jesus healed from miles away). He is exercising his divine wisdom in allowing us to suffer these things because he knows that they are truly most helpful to our salvation. That is why Jesus tells Martha, "*I* am the resurrection and the life." If *he* is the resurrection, then demanding anything else which would not lead to our resurrection would make no sense. He knows the goal, and he wants to bring us to it. And the goal IS the resurrection.

And yet there is no Resurrection without the Cross. Since this was true for Jesus, it is also true for us who make up his body. That is why in these two weeks, we must fix our eyes on the cross, not just in history, but present in our lives. The life to come, our resurrection, lies hidden to us, as behind a veil. But if ever you wanted a sure bearing, none but the Cross is to be found. And when our life is spent, our Passover made, then what seems to earthly reasoning to be utter darkness, becomes for us bright as the day, the day that shall never end—the eternal Easter Festival. Let us, then, keep the feast.