

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In our Gospel today we hear that Mary's brother Lazarus has just died. She is more than likely emotionally distraught at the death of her brother and in turn the others gathered with Mary begin to get emotional. In this gathering of emotions, Jesus himself becomes emotionally troubled in the wake of this death.

When we consider this emotional moment with Mary and those gathered with her in the presence of the blessed hope of Jesus Christ, I ask, what is it that troubles our hearts and triggers our emotions so deeply about death? No doubt, it is the mystery, the emotional suppression, and sheer loss that we experience as we see play out in this scene before us today. But as we discern our emotions and the cause of our emotions, may we see that there something more to be considered about our emotions?

At the very start of this Gospel lesson, Mary, along with the Jews who came with Mary, and even Jesus, seem to be emotionally experiencing this death of Lazarus in different ways. The essence of their emotions, all seem to be arising from different facets of this death of Lazarus. Like these folks in our Gospel lesson, we too, experience death in different ways and our emotions arise within us due to different and unknown reasons. And in our various reactions when experiencing death, there is probably a point when we find ourselves quietly alone with our emotions, quietly listening to that inner voice reflecting, reminiscing, and maybe even angrily questioning the whereabouts of God, and in turn wondering about our own vestige, or our own mortality? But in the middle of all this, it is our faith that is questioning our life's footprint, our mortality, and most of all...the whereabouts of God. It is the same faith that enables us to recognize the One who chooses to dwell with us in these times, the One who suffers and weeps for us and with us, and through that faith we see the One who will wipe every tear from our eyes, the One who, through His physical presence, shows to us that death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more. This is the lesson before us today as our worship itself centers our hearts and our minds on this very moment in our lives when those known and unknown become a blessed memory.

Today we celebrate and honor all the Saints of this past year as well as all the Saints of every time and every place. And today against the backdrop of this worship, perhaps we come face to face again with our deep emotions that accompany death and once again we hear our inner voice that torments our souls with fear, with confusion, with anger, with deep sorrow, and we find ourselves empathetically engaged emotionally with the names that are lifted up among us today. Nonetheless, today as we take the time to pause, to reflect, and remember those who have entered the Church Triumphant, may we also find rest for our troubled souls in the fact that we are not forgotten at the time of death...we are remembered and this is the point of our worship today in that God's glory is made manifest through death because death is no more...remembering that God's most profound love for us is revealed to us in death, the death of Jesus Christ, God's only Son. *THIS* is the hope of this very promise that is embedded in this passage and carries us through our grief.

When we gather for worship, we gather to celebrate and remember these saints and through this gathering we see how faith served to strengthen them and how they experienced God's grace at

the time death. In this worship we honor and remember all those who, in death, have joined the Church Triumphant not by what they did as individuals but what God has done for them at the time of their death. As we read these names today in our worship, may we also hear Jesus calling to each of the saints lifted up to come out...come out of that tomb of death, unbounded from sin and death...and into a new life.

So on this day, All Saints' Sunday, we can take much comfort in knowing this, but as joyous as this is, we remain here...in this life...and we remain here in our emotions. There is much to focus on when looking at the raising of Lazarus but there is much more on the emotions exhibited by Jesus and the others. And this is where every one of us sitting here today are present in this story. I think it's safe to say we all know of the resurrection we share with Jesus Christ, nonetheless, death must happen first before the resurrection and this is the part that hurts the most and causes the pain and confusion that is manifest through our emotions. But I want to look closer at the emotions displayed in this scene before us today in this Gospel lesson because its where we are right now and it reveals a more intimate relationship for us with God.

So as we think about Jesus being "greatly disturbed," or "deeply moved" I want us to consider also what moved Jesus to tears and why? There is much scholarly debate about the emotional state and the tears of Jesus. Some would say it was the death of Lazarus, some...the disbelief of Mary and Martha along with the Jews that were here in this story. And still, some argue that it is death itself that moves Jesus. All of these would be true if we just read the verses appointed for today's lesson but the entire chapter would say that's not so. Looking at the entirety of this passage there is added suspense due to the delay of Jesus in going to Lazarus which also foreshadows the dangers that await Jesus' impending death in Judea. When Lazarus falls ill, Mary and Martha send word to Jesus and this is where the suspense begins:

"Lord, he whom you love is ill."⁴ But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." (John 11:3-4)

Then Jesus says to the disciples,

"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him."¹² The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right."

¹³ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶ Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." (John 11:11-16)

I've included this part of the story that is not part of our appointed lesson today because it adds even more of a human element into this scene...it adds the suspense and it adds what I think is the very key to the Good News that is entangled in this story. Unfortunately, we tend to refer to Thomas NOT so much as the twin but we refer to him as "Doubting Thomas." But here in this passage Thomas is far from doubt and directs us with his words directly to the heart of the matter within this scene with Lazarus when he says:

"Let us also go, that we may die with him."

What Thomas is saying is, as the suspense and pain of death looms and we get tangled up in our very human feelings and our emotions that confuse us, make us angry and afraid, Thomas is reminding us that these *human* emotions ought to die so that we are able to see the bigger picture...and that is the sacred hope of the resurrection.

We know that in the Gospel of John whatever Jesus reveals about himself he is revealing that same thing about God to us. So, Jesus is showing us our human condition and in that, he is revealing a God who knows our condition, knows our emotions and meets us in them...a God who identifies with us in these emotions, and we are even united with Him in them as seen in the emotional state of Jesus. And this is revealed to us When, in time, we can finally look past all the emotion that comes with death. Or, if we cannot look past all the emotion that comes with death, perhaps we can embrace it for what it truly is, our connection not just to loved ones, but to others as well who suffer death and even God.

In our emotions at the time of death, we fear and even reject the struggle that is brought on by loss of loved ones, but I am reminded of how Bonhoeffer addresses this...and I have quoted him different times in funeral homilies, that it is these emotions that connect us to our past, to our loved ones, and to others. Bonhoeffer writes this:

There is nothing that can replace the absence of someone dear to us, and one should not even attempt to do so. One must simply hold out and endure it.

At first that sounds very hard, but at the same time it is also a great comfort. For to the extent the emptiness truly remains unfilled one remains connected to the other person through it. It is wrong to say that God fills the emptiness. God in no way fills it but much more leaves it precisely unfilled and thus helps us preserve — even in pain — the authentic relationship.¹

Within the isolation and divisiveness of our culture today, may this lesson that is centered in so many different emotions, show us all how our emotions play out beyond the walls of our churches today and connects us to others...out there also and not just in here. Hippolytus of Rome (c. 170 – c. 235 AD) was a Bishop of Rome and one of the most important second-third centuries Christian theologians, when writing on the resurrection of Lazarus tells us how he interpreted the weeping of Jesus and how it plays out for us today beyond these walls. He writes:

What need was there to weep for him whom he was soon about to raise? But Jesus wept to give us an example of sympathy and kindness toward our fellow human beings. Jesus wept that he might by deed rather than by word teach us to (do as St. Paul wrote to the Romans 12:15) “weep with those who weep.” Jesus wept but did not mourn – avoiding absolute tearlessness as harsh and inhuman but rejecting love of mourning as ignoble and cowardly. Jesus wept, assigning due measure to his sympathy.²

Jesus wept, but Jesus did not mourn. He wept for our human condition. How could Jesus mourn, he is the promise of new life, he simply wept with those who were weeping, or we could

¹ Bethge, Eberhard editor. *Letters & Papers From Prison*: New York, The Macmillan Company, 1953, 1967, 1971. This quote is from a letter written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Renate and Eberhard Bethge on Christmas Eve 1943. Page 176.

² Joel C. Elowsky, Editor, Thomas C. Oden, General Editor. *Ancient Christian Commentary of Scripture*, New Testament IVb, John 11-21. Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2007. Section, 11:28-37 Mary and Martha Come to Meet Jesus, 11:35 Jesus Wept, He Wept But Did Not Mourn, page 20. Parenthetical phrase is my comment.

say Jesus was reflectively listening by weeping with those who weep to show us that he knows our human condition. What greater love could we have for our neighbor when we too, as Jesus shows us, consider and even experience their emotional state, whatever it may be.

We have before us in these words of John in our Gospel, a God who knows our emotions, a God who connects to us through our human emotions. Likewise, just as we connect to our loved ones through our emotions so too, God connects to us and we connect to others when we experience their emotions.

So today as we remember the saints of this past year along with the saints of every time and place, we do so with a great deal of emotion. Not only do we remember our loved ones, but we meet them again in the emotions brought about by our memories that stir in us, we are united with them emotionally just as we are united to God in them. We are not alone in our emotions when remembering those who have passed, nor are we the first and only ones to experience death. As we remember our family, our friends, and our loved ones today in this worship, we remember those who have vanished from our presence. But today they are remembered as their memories stir our memories that fill our hearts to the brim with a sundry of emotions, but it is our emotions that draw us nearer to our loved ones, to others like us who have experienced death beyond these walls, and also to Christ who knows our emotions and meets us in them with the assurance that our loved ones have been brought out of the cave of death to a new life in Christ.

Today Jesus shows us a God who not only knows our emotions, we see and hear of a God who is among us, dwells with us and shares our emotions and joins us in them. So, as we remember our saints of this past year and our saints from all times, let our hurt and loss remind us of the joy they all share in the resurrection, the joy they share with us now when we remember them in the resurrection. Let us remember the joy that they remain in our lives and let their death remind us too of the life we all share in Jesus Christ.

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen*