



St Marylebone
Parish Church



11am Holy Eucharist Lent 5

The Chapel of Our Lady Mary of the Chimney Stacks,
The Chaplain's House, Marylebone

Readings:

The Epistle of St Paul to the Romans 8.6-11

The Holy Gospel according to St John 11.1-45

Today's Gospel is the raising of Lazarus. It is a wonderful foreshadowing of the Resurrection of Christ. Here we see Christ's power of death and life.

In Lazarus' family - with his sisters Mary and Martha - we saw the squabbling and wrangling of normal human family earlier in St John's Gospel. In the stress of the world at the moment, money, food, and the pressure of living on top of each other; we should be comforted that arguing and stupidity are not absent from the lives of the saints! Remember when Saints Martha and Mary squabble about who's done all the housework when Jesus visits them? Who's pulling their weight? Who's taking the mick?

Today Lazarus, Martha and Mary, invite us to take two things from them into our homes and lives. One is to develop gentleness with ourselves and each other, and the other is the Resurrection of Jesus.

The Orthodox Christians of the East hear today's Gospel every year on the Saturday before Palm Sunday. It's called Lazarus Saturday. Our western nod to that custom is setting it as the Gospel of the Sunday before Palm Sunday once every 3 years in the cycle of the lectionary.

Lazarus walks out of the tomb, summoned back to life by the Lord. We see Christ's power. We see His mission. We see the assurance of His love for the whole human family.

But Lazarus will die again. He keeps his grave clothes; a sign that he will need them again. Jesus does not come back out of the tomb (so to speak) He goes through it, through death and out the other side. His grave clothes (St John makes a point of telling us) are folded neatly. They will not be needed again.

We hear the Lazarus Gospel now in order to give us hope and light - a promise - to carry us through the dark days of Passiontide and Holy Week. But we are also reminded that since that first Easter day 20 centuries ago God is doing something *new*. *Unlike* Lazarus' return to earthly life, since the first Easter, is the promise of new and *unending* life.

The frailty of our earthly life (so very much in the forefront of our minds at the moment, our frailty) the frailty of our earthly life is not reversed or 'patched up'. Through our frailty and death, we will discover that death has no more power in the universe and that our true life is already 'hid with Christ in God' (Colossians 3.3).

So let us, from our homes making our Spiritual Communion through this act of worship today, amidst the anxiety and sickness and frailty of our world, with hearts full of prayer for all those in need, let us say with S. Martha in today's Gospel 'Yes, Lord, I believe'.

Pope Francis spoke to the world on Friday. There's a link to his full text in the text of this sermon on the St Marylebone website - it is well worth reading his amazing and prophetic words.

[<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-03/urbi-et-orbi-pope-coronavirus-prayer-blessing.html>]

He spoke of the importance of believing. 'Yes, Lord, I believe.'

Pope Francis said, 'Which is not so much believing that you exist, but coming to you and trusting in you'.

Today, (as we will in the hour of our death, and in every moment between now and then) we are invited to come to Jesus and do life in His friendship, in His service and in the abundance of His love and joy.

A love and joy that does not pretend that fear and sickness and struggle do not exist, but one that has gone through fear and sickness and struggle, *and even death*, and come through it and out the other side into new and unending life. Which is our true homeland.