

March 22, 2026—Fifth Sunday of Lent

Last Sunday, Jesus' disciples asked if the man born blind was punished because of his sin or the sins of his parents. That question seems strange to us, but it was often assumed that illnesses and tragedies were a punishment for sin. If I get angry and punch a wall with my fist there are certain built-in punishments to that sin: my hand hurts and there is a dent in the wall. However, Jesus answered the disciples saying, "**Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him.**" This Sunday's Gospel makes a similar point about the meaning of suffering.

Jesus deliberately delayed going to the house of Lazarus when he heard that he was seriously ill. He could have certainly healed Lazarus as He did so many others. Jesus finally told the disciples that Lazarus was asleep, meaning that he was dead. They did not understand, so Jesus explains why He delayed, "**Lazarus has died. And I am glad for you that I was not there, that you may believe.**" The purpose of the death of Lazarus was not a punishment, but an amazing miracle of resurrection to strengthen the faith of the apostles and us who read about it in the Gospel of John.

Earlier in John's Gospel, it tells us about another visit of Jesus to the house of Lazarus. At that time, Martha didn't appear in a very good light; she complained to Jesus that she had to do all the work to prepare the meal for Him and His apostles while her sister Mary did nothing but sit at the feet of Jesus listening to Him. This time, when Jesus arrived at Bethany, the faith and hope of Martha shine forth.

Martha went out to meet Jesus. She is sorrowful, but not bitter. She said, "**Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give you.**" Jesus told her that her brother will rise, and she responds that she believes in the resurrection of the dead on the last day, at the end of time. Jesus doesn't want to speak only of the distant future, but brings it into the present moment, saying, "**I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?**" Jesus was not just speaking about life and death in this world, but the life of grace that leads to eternal life.

Martha responded, "**Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.**" In the face of sorrow at her brother's death, Martha did not lose faith, but grew in faith that day. Jesus

proved His words that He was the resurrection and the life. He went to the tomb of Lazarus and said, **“Lazarus, come out!”** After three days of death, the human body begins to noticeably decompose; Lazarus had been in the tomb 4 days. At Jesus command, the dead body wrapped with the burial clothes is alive again and walks out of the tomb, healed and whole. Could there be a more dramatic scene!

This great miracle of resurrection is meant to point to the resurrection of Jesus in the near future, but also, to teach us about God’s plans for us. In the Creed, we profess, **“I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.”** In the First Reading, from chapter 37, the Prophet Ezekiel foretold the resurrection of the dead. **“Oh, my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them.”** At the beginning of chapter 37, he saw a vision of a valley filled with dry bones. He heard the dry bones rattle and saw them come together as human skeletons, then the muscle and skin came upon them, and they were given the breath of life and stood as a great multitude before him.

In ancient times, the pagans burned the bodies of the dead and put them in tombs in a Necropolis, meaning the City of the Dead. There was no artwork or words of hope and eternal life, only a lament for those they lost forever. Christians began to bury the bodies of the dead in a place they called a cemetery, meaning a sleeping place. They expected the bodies of their loved ones to rise from the dead one day. There was artwork about resurrection and eternal life, symbols of hope in Jesus.

Lazarus would die again one day, but after this experience there would be no fear of death for him. Jesus calls us to believe in Him, for at the end of time, the body will be transformed and restored to life and then joined to our immortal soul to live forever. Angels were created without a body as pure spirits, but we were created as creatures of body and soul.

In response to the death and resurrection of Jesus, St. Paul asked: **“Death, where is your sting? Now the sting of death is sin”** (1 Cor. 15:55-56). Jesus by His death and resurrection takes away the sting of sin and death which originated with our first parents’ sin. At the Easter Vigil, we sing the Exultet, which explains Original Sin in these terms: **“O truly necessary sin of Adam, destroyed completely by the Death of Christ! O happy fault that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer.”** We have two weeks until Good Friday and Easter Sunday, let’s make the most of these remaining days to prepare to celebrate the Paschal Mysteries with renewed faith and hope and love in the joy of the resurrection!