

Gospel Reading John 11:1-45

11:25-26 Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.



In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

My brothers and sister in Christ, this week has been a real test for all of us. The curbs imposed on our freedom and liberty are entirely unprecedented in our society. With the closure of our church buildings and the entire restraint placed upon public gatherings I find myself struggling with the words of the Benedictus (the song of Zechariah) at morning prayer 'Free to worship him without fear'. I see the increasing fear spreading across our country as the lockdown begins to impact upon personal finances and the mental wellbeing of so many. I particularly pray for families who were struggling to live peaceful lives before being contained in their homes. My fear is that we will see more pain and suffering from the effects of the lockdown than from the virus itself. I ask you therefore all to pray especially for those people whose family lives are being challenged by the lockdown and for those whose relationships are under particular strain at this time.

I know that many of you are frightened, and many of you will be feeling the weight of the measures laying heavily upon you which can lead to a feeling of complete disengagement from life. This is something we will need to shake off together by turning to our Lord and Saviour ever more closely at this time. the Lord is the only one who can save us truly from the threat of ourselves.

Today's gospel reading stands out as one of the great moments in the earthly ministry of our Lord. The heroine of the story is Martha, who demonstrates great strength, courage, and wisdom. She embodies, I think for us, all the characteristics we need at this time of challenge upon us. So firstly, Martha, as we know, heads out to meet Jesus on his way to her home. To understand what she is doing we need to realise that in Jesus' time, after a close relative had died, the women remained in the house of their relative for 30 days. For Martha to leave the

house was to break all the 'normal' rules of society. That Martha runs out to meet a man to whom she is neither related or married is even more shocking. So Martha must have been really, really angry with Jesus.

'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'

I think there is rage, confusion and upset all rolled into Martha's cry. I know for some of us at this time, we may feel like shouting to the Lord 'Lord if you had been here....' If you feel like that, please do express that as the more we talk to God, the more he has to listen and respond to. We see this in Martha, she has the courage to face Christ in all her fury and pain and after a conversation that shows she is a theologically astute she receives one of the great I Am sayings of the Gospel 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.' If we engage with our Lord, we will be blessed. This means handing all that we have over to him, our lives entirely, and for that we will always be rewarded.

Our Gospel reading recalls to us one of the last acts of Christ before his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. In raising Lazarus from the dead we see Christ show his power over life and death. Lazarus is raised, not resurrected, so he ultimately went on to die again. Christ's own resurrection was the dawn of a new era in human history when death was conquered in its entirety. But what we see in Lazarus is, I think, hope. If Martha carries the cares and concerns of the world to Christ, it is Lazarus who carries our hope, in his raising to life again through Christ. We must above all focus our hope in Christ. At the moment there appears to be no end to the crisis, and we may be stuck in societal paralysis for a considerable time. When the world seems quite so upended, we all need to, I believe, keep our focus on the one constant in our lives, our Lord and Saviour, who will ultimately show us the way forward.

I encourage you all to continue to keep in contact with one another over the phone, the internet or other distanced communication, and above all to keep communicating with our Lord, to pray without ceasing (1Thessalonians 5:17) that he will show us the way.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.