

Gospel Reflections 29 March 2020

[John 11: 1- 44](#)

'Now a man named Lazarus was sick...'

The first line of this week's reading takes on an eerie air in the world's current situation. Could be that it might be my name, or the name of a parent, family member or friend inserted into that phrase... *Now a man named (Mark) was sick* – it's getting personal. The growing CV-19 crisis these past weeks seems to mirror the increased intensity of Jesus' ministry as we get closer to Holy Week. In this week's reading we see Jesus confronted with not just sickness but death itself, the death of a close friend.

It's getting personal for him too – very.

One thing that is so unique about this story is the raw emotion shown by Jesus. Even knowing that he would raise Lazarus from the dead, he has intense feelings of sadness, grief and compassion. *'When Jesus saw her (Mary) weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled (v 33)...Jesus wept' (v 36)*. He shows deep compassion (literally the sharing of feelings with another). As a human, he shares in Mary and Martha's grief and pain.

As Jesus approaches Lazarus' tomb he is *'... once **more deeply moved**' (v 38)*. Some translations (eg The Message) suggest that Jesus is not just grief-stricken but even angry. This is indeed deeply personal for him. Yes, he is moved in love for Mary and Martha as he is for Lazarus but he has a deeper knowledge of what must be done, what **he must do**, for death to be ultimately defeated. This is at the core of his being. He knows what pain, suffering, sickness and death mean to each one of us and that this is THE purpose that he has come into the world. He groans and weeps too perhaps as a man knowing of what is required of him in the days ahead. He understands what sickness and death means to each of us and what it will ultimately cost him. Can it get any more personal for Jesus?

And then, as Jesus asks for the tomb to be opened, he does something profoundly personal indeed. He calls his friend by name – **'Lazarus, come out!'** (v 43). There is something so intimate and beautiful about this. He calls him back to life using his name. This is about Lazarus but it is also about you and me. What a thing to look forward to – the day when Jesus will say, *(Mark), come out!* He knows I'm sick, he knows I'm dying and he weeps. He groans and is filled with sadness and anger for what my sin does, but with his dying arms outstretched he calls me by name and calls me back to life, now and for all time. His weeping becomes my joy.

Hear again the words of Jesus, *'this is my body, given and shed **for you.**'*
This IS very personal. For Jesus, for me and for all humanity.

Peace and blessings in these extraordinary times,

Mark

And...

Much of the time, honestly, it does not feel like death has been defeated. Like Mary and Martha, we cry out in fear and pain and ask our agonizing questions – about illness, job loss, financial crises, loss of loved ones, war and terrorism – whatever casts death's shadow across our lives. Even as we cry and grieve, however, we live and wait in hope. Like Martha and Mary, we learn that God does not act exactly when, where, or how we think God should act. But God will act in God's good time, and sickness, fear and death will not have the final word. The day of resurrection will come.

*"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; **I have called you by name; you are mine.** When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you."* Is 43:1