

# Lazarus sets stage for resurrection

**JESUS WASN'T THERE.** His friend got sick and died and Jesus wasn't there (John 11:1-44). Worse, after hearing that Lazarus was ill, Jesus dilly-dallied two more days before going to Bethany (11:6). No wonder Martha scolded Jesus, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." (11:21). Heaven's complaint department hears many prayers that begin that way: "If you had been here..."

John skillfully positions the greatest miracle of Jesus' ministry, the raising of Lazarus. John's Jesus is miserly with miracles. Only six of them come to light in the Gospel. This is the last and greatest of them all. It concludes Jesus' public ministry and sets the stage for his arrest and crucifixion.

Fr. Paul Turner



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**Good News**  
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**THE MIRACLES** of Jesus relate his wondrous power, but they also illustrate his message. The Kingdom of God had come. God will redeem all creation. No miracle states this more dramatically than the raising of Lazarus. Other Gospels tell of Jesus raising people from the dead (the daughter of Jairus in Mk 5:22-43, and the only son of the widow of Nain in Lk 7:11-16). In both cases Jesus raises someone who has just died. Lazarus, however, has been in the tomb four days. A death stench will be detected. John includes these details so we don't miss the drama of this situation: Lazarus is *really* dead. By raising Lazarus to life, Jesus will proclaim the power of God's kingdom present among us.

Can any miracle be more wondrous than resus-

citation? Only one: resurrection. Resurrection becomes believable once Jesus has demonstrated that he has power over life and death. His resurrection will not be a coming to life again as in the case of Lazarus. He will rise to new life.

To assist the reader in professing that faith, John places Martha center stage. The actual miracle fills only the last two of these 44 verses. Chances are that when John first heard the story, he had little more than the basic details. Virtually every miracle in the Gospels is told rather quickly compared to the ponderous descriptions we find here and in the man born blind (John 9). It may be that John emphasized the role of Martha to help the reader understand the importance of the miracle.

**MARTHA SPEAKS** for us. Her sorrow elicits a dramatic pronouncement from Jesus, "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25). More importantly, though, Martha reveals a confident faith in Jesus: "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God" (11:27). In the other Gospels, Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, but John lets Martha speak for the Church. John repeats her words at the end of the Gospel when he tells why he wrote the book: "So that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God" (20:31).

As a result of this miracle, many believe in Jesus, but others plot to take his life (11:45; 53). In fact, the chief priests even planned to kill Lazarus (12:10).

The third scrutiny chooses this text to assure catechumens that Jesus has power over life and death. Their Baptism will move them from the death of their former sins into the new life of Christ.

The power of Jesus prevails even when it seems he isn't there. It demands a response from all of us. Will we fight his will? Or will we believe? □

*Father Paul Turner is pastor of St. John Francis Regis Parish, Kansas City.*

## Daily Scripture Readings

### Fourth Sunday of Lent

Sunday, March 17

1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a

Psalms 23:1-6

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

### Monday, March 18

Isaiah 65:17-21

Psalms 30:2, 4-6, 11-13

John 4:43-54

### Tuesday, March 19

2 Samuel 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16

Psalms 89:2-5, 27, 29

Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22

Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a

### Wednesday, March 20

Isaiah 49:8-15

Psalms 145:8-9, 13-14, 17-18

John 5:17-30

### Thursday, March 21

Exodus 32:7-14

Psalms 106:19-23

John 5:31-47

### Friday, March 22

Wisdom 2:1a, 12-22

Psalms 34:17-21, 23

John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

### Saturday, March 23

Jeremiah 11:18-20

Psalms 7:2-3, 9-12

John 7:40-53

### Fifth Sunday in Lent

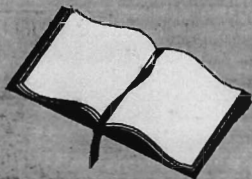
Sunday, March 24

Ezekiel 37:12-14

Psalms 130:1-8

Romans 8:8-11

John 11:1-45



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In today's readings, Israel is in exile, Lazarus is dead. List some of your own losses through death or broken relationships.

2. With these thoughts in mind, what happens inside

you as you attend to this Sunday's readings?

3. Who, besides ourselves, needs the message of today's readings? What can you do this week to let the Word be heard?

Rose Therese Huelsman □