

Fifth Sunday of Lent 2025A OCIA

*“Lord, where were you when we called for you? Why didn’t you do something to help?”* Whenever our trust in God is tested by the very real sorrows and losses we experience, the words of Martha and Mary echo in our hearts: “Lord, if you had been here ...” ... words that express their disappointment in the Friend they had trusted. We can also hear perhaps an echo of the disciples on the road to Emmaus: “We were hoping that He was the one to save us” – and we imagine the voice trailing off before the unspoken conclusion – but He failed us, we were wrong, it was just a hollow dream. We remember too the words of the Israelites in the Exodus, as they thirsted in the desert for water: “Is the Lord in our midst, or not?”

John tells us that Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus. So, in sending word: “Master, the one you love is ill,” their expectation is obvious and natural: they knew his compassion for the sick and his power to heal; surely He would rush to cure their brother. But Jesus does not come until it is too late. Lazarus died, is in the tomb, *and to the sisters and the crowds, it is clear that Jesus failed them. The more we expect from God, the greater the risk for disappointment; so we can think that it is better not to hope.*

Jesus approaches this tomb with deep sorrow and a profoundly troubled spirit, not only for this family that He loves, but because here is the ultimate consequence of the power of sin – to bring death into the world. In the background are words from the Book of Wisdom: *“God did not make death, nor does He rejoice in the destruction of the living.”* In a short time, Jesus knew this scene would be replayed – a cave with a stone across it, and on the other side would be another corpse – not Lazarus, but Jesus Himself. But His death would be different: not one more inevitable consequence of sin, but a freely-accepted sacrifice to redeem and overcome the power of sin. *We cannot fully understand why God’s salvation works this way, but we can rejoice in the hope it contains: that Jesus so completely unites Himself with our human weakness and alienation from God that NO ONE need live without hope, beyond the power of God’s mercy to save.*

Lazarus was returned to this life, a miracle that astounded the crowds and reunited this family. Coming out of the tomb, Lazarus came back to a life that would again know sorrows, sufferings, and passing joys. Eventually he would die once more. *Yet what a difference it must have made to know that even if death awaited, he also knew the One who had power over death.* Even so, we know MORE than Lazarus could have known. What Jesus promises us is not resuscitation, but *resurrection* ... a new life, a new KIND of life completely free from pain and loss, uncertainty and fear, ever again. Death has not been removed from our world, but it has been CHANGED, redeemed, reclaimed by God as a passage to that new and perfect life. It is not found here in its fullness, but it BEGINS here in its transforming power.

And more than just receiving this hope, we are sent by Jesus each day to SHARE that hope, being present with human compassion and divine grace to those who have known disappointment and who struggle to believe. Remember that it was *those who came to comfort Martha and Mary who also saw Jesus work a miracle.*

*Where were you when we called for you? Why don't you do something to help? Is the Lord in our midst or not?* Those questions are met with the question of fundamental faith and trust Jesus puts to us: "I am the Resurrection and the Life. Do you believe this?" We won't always understand, but with Martha, we want to say: *"Yes, Lord, I have come to believe that You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life; that You are exactly as we need you to be: in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, now, and forever."*