

RCIA – THE THIRD SCRUTINY

On the 5th Sunday of Lent, with Holy Week just one week away, we celebrate the final Scrutiny with our Elect at the 11:30 Mass. Having examined their lives to discern what is sinful and in need of purification in the prior 2 Scrutiny masses by reflecting on Jesus as the source of eternal life and the light of the world, the Elect are now ready to deepen their prayerful contemplation as Jesus reveals Himself as the resurrection and the life in St. John's account of the raising of Lazarus.

Like the Gospels of the prior 2 Scrutiny Masses, Jesus reveals Himself this Sunday as the long-awaited Messiah, the Son of God, and those encountering him are brought to belief in Him. However, there is a distinctly different tone to this Sunday's Gospel: missing is the joy of the Samaritan woman and townspeople and the almost comic sarcasm of the Man Born Blind in his dialogue with the Pharisees. The pall of death covers the Lazarus story as Jesus and his close friends, the sisters Mary and Martha, confront the harsh reality of the passing of a loved one.

From the outset, Jesus knows what He will do: he will bring Lazarus back to life "for the glory of God" and so that His disciples "may believe." So why all the tears and anguish? While he is still making his way to where Lazarus was lying in his tomb, Jesus is met, first by Martha and then by Mary; in words filled with both faith and a suggestion of anger, each sister says: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." The sisters seem to ask: "Where were you when we most needed you; how could you let this happen?" Deeply troubled, Jesus responds: "Where have you laid him?" Jesus is searching for Lazarus and the sisters were looking for Jesus in their time of need, but something is standing in the way, something that brought the savior of the world to tears.

Echoing in Jesus' question in search of Lazarus are the words of the Lord God in search of Adam in the Garden of Eden: "Where are you?" Fearful and ashamed after committing the first sin, Adam hid himself from God, no longer able to walk with Him side-by-side in Paradise. This original sin separated man from the relationship with God that the Father intended, a separation that brought death, disunity, and misery to God's crowning creation down through the ages. It is this fallen state of sinful mankind that Jesus confronts in Bethany, as he grieves with the mourners over Lazarus, four-days dead in his tomb, bound by burial cloths.

There is much to take comfort from in the raising of Lazarus. We know and believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, who has conquered both sin and death. For those who have ever mourned the loss of a loved one, we know that Jesus mourns with us, deeply troubled by the misery and brokenness which sin has brought into the world. We are assured that the end of earthly life is not the last word, for whoever believes in Jesus will have eternal life. But we cannot untie ourselves from the bonds of sin and death; only our Savior can. As the Elect prepare to be cleansed of sin and united with Christ in Baptism, and as we stand on the threshold of celebrating the Paschal Mystery of Our Lord's passion, death and resurrection in the Great Easter Triduum, may we confront our own sinfulness and recognize our need for a redeemer who suffered and died so that we might have eternal life with Him, the life that He willed for us from the beginning.