

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT, YEAR A, 2020

Throughout these difficult and testing times, it has been comforting to see the care that is being offered within our streets and neighbourhoods, amongst church communities and on social media sites. Families have been watching out for each other, older members having shopping brought to them, neighbours have been keeping in constant contact and friendships are being made, being rediscovered and are being made stronger.

On Wednesday of last week we celebrated the solemnity of the Annunciation, and I pointed out in the Homily that the Blessed Virgin Mary brought God into the world in the second person of the Trinity in the fullness of his divinity, and named him Jesus to give substance to the fullness of his humanity; both divine and human. In the account, the sign, as St John defines it, of the raising of Lazarus we see the divinity of Jesus and his humanity working in harmony. It can sometimes be hard to imagine Jesus having the sort of friendships that we have. Friends that he could relax with, dine with, and enjoy the company of, the kind of friendships that are upholding us at this time. But he did, and none were closer to Him than Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

We are told in the Gospels that Jesus went to their house at least on two occasions, one very pleasant, for dinner and one not so pleasant, the time when his friend Lazarus died.

The worry that we experience when a loved one is ill, or the emotions that surround the death of someone we love, like anger and grief can realise in us, especially people of faith, the confusing swing and struggle between faith and fear. Several conversations I

have had this week with patients via email and telephone, and some frontline NHS staff and even some from the parish have almost felt guilty about being angry at various aspects of what we are all facing. But we can see that even Martha displayed a degree of frustration and anger at Jesus when she questioned him as to why he didn't appear sooner. She could do this to Jesus, she could believe in him and still be free to question; she displays an honesty that true friendship can bare.

And we also see this in Jesus, in the fullness of his humanity. We often concentrate on that shortest verse in the Bible, "Jesus wept", and why shouldn't he when faced with the death of his dear friend? In the close proximity of his own death, Jesus faced the destructive forces of the last enemy in his friend Lazarus and knew that very shortly he would be doing battle with death not just for Lazarus's sake but for all his friends, all those who would come to love him.

But there is another moment before the very natural and human shedding of tears and that is before he weeps. John says that Jesus was in great distress", as I so often tell you the Greek is more revealing. John uses the word "ebrimaomai" which literally means anger or frustration and for all you horse lovers it is a word often used to describe the snorting of a horse. Our Lord could get angry at the seemingly unjust and frustrating fickleness of life. It is not wrong for us to feel the same way in our current situation.

But like Martha, hold it in tension with her sure knowledge that Jesus was also the Son Of God and that all things are in his divine care. She had a general understanding of what her faith told her about the resurrection of the dead, and she was now being confronted with the truth of that statement in the person of her friend Jesus. "You

believe in the resurrection?" says Jesus "well that is what is before you, Martha; this is what your friend is I am the resurrection."

There is a statement of Jesus' divinity and he demonstrates it further by calling back Lazarus from the dead and bidding him come forth from the tomb. It is a call to us all. We are all bidden to step forth from the darkness of those things which keep us dead to the truth of Jesus and his gift of everlasting life. There is a place for frustration and even anger at the events that seem to be carrying us forward at the moment but when it is in constructive dialogue with Jesus, in prayer, we can begin to leave those frustrations in the tomb and step forward into the presence who calls us out from death into the promise of a future glory.

Amen.