

Dear Brothers and Sisters



“Poor Lazarus”

A family I know regularly prayed together on Sundays. They would sit around the dining room table, and read the Gospel of that day, and then comment on it, and share their experiences.

This particular day Frank, a NYC Firefighter, the husband of Jean, and the father of their ten children sat around the table with them, read the Gospel we hear in Mass today, the resurrection of Lazarus.

After reading the passage, with all the eyes of the kids upon him, Frank said these words, “Poor Lazarus.” Lazarus had already died, and was on his way to heaven when he had to come back here! The grief and tears of Lazarus’ sisters, family and neighbors moved Jesus himself to pity, and he raised Lazarus back from the tomb. I’m sure his sisters were ecstatic, but Frank wasn’t too sure how Lazarus felt about it.

It wasn’t till some years later, after Frank himself had died in the Twin towers on 9/11, that his words really hit home and made sense to his family. After Jean lost her husband, and the ten children their father, they were wracked with grief.

That is until they sat down one Sunday to pray.

For many months after Frank’s death they were unable to pray. Jean would sit down at the table with the kids, see Frank’s empty chair, and collapse in a ball of tears. But this particular Sunday she gave it another go, and read the Gospel of the day, which happened to be the resurrection of Lazarus. After reading it to the children, her husband Frank’s words came back to her. “Poor Lazarus.” Her grief was lifted, and the family turned a corner. They had been missing their Dad, wishing he were still here, crying that he was no longer with them, but here was this Gospel staring them in the face, and Franks words were in their ears.

Sure, Jesus raised him from the dead, brought him back, but Lazarus would one day have to face death again. Why would you want someone to come back if they were already in heaven? If we love someone, we want the best for them, not what’s best for us. What’s better than being in heaven? Jean understood, and so did the children.

A social worker who had been assigned to work with the family after 9/11 noticed a dramatic change, and asked Jean if they were doing anything different. “We began to pray again” was Jeans reply. The social worker was so impressed with the change in attitude of the kids, that she asked Jean if she could teach other grieving families from 9/11 how to pray.

The raising of Lazarus prefigures Jesus’ own death and Resurrection. Our faith, our Christianity, our Catholicism, is based on an event: Christ was crucified and is Risen. Death is swallowed up in victory! O death where is your victory! There is no grief, no heartache, no loss, no suffering, no anguish which is unaffected by his Resurrection

The Resurrection of Christ is not celebrated as a memorial or a thing of the past, but as something that is present and happening today among us.

May we draw strength from today’s Gospel, as we experience the pandemic. Christ Risen is with each of us. The love of God never fails. Out of Death he brings Life. Out of suffering he brings Truth.

Do not be afraid.

Fr. Jean