



ST. RAYMOND DE PEÑAFORT

Lent

March 26, 2023

Reflections

Dean Dave

We are in the home stretch now; just a couple of more weeks until Easter. Hopefully, this Lent has truly been a fruitful one for each of you. If not, it's not too late to prepare for whatever it is that God wants to grace you with this Easter. The opportunity is still there for all of us, an opportunity to get ready to be more than we were before; more giving, more loving, more ALIVE.

The other day walking around the neighborhood, I started looking for signs of spring and found them. I noticed crocuses and other various bulbs starting to push their way through the hardened soil. There they were in the same spots as in years past. Some were looking a little frail due to winter's reluctance to loosen its grip. This time of year, I tend to do this to reassure myself that spring is on the way and to start planning my summer landscape. After living in this COVID world for the past three years, I needed signs of life and hope.

Life and hope are on full display in today's Gospel passage from John. And not just today, but the last couple of weeks as well. Two weeks ago, we heard a woman depart from the well more alive than she had been before. Last Sunday, we heard a blind man encounter Jesus and left more alive and more whole than he had been before. And today, we hear how Jesus restored the life of his friend, Lazarus.

And it's powerful, not just in the sense of what Jesus was able to do two thousand years ago, but what our faith tells us. It tells us that this is the same outcome awaiting all of us. Jesus wants to take every little death we experience, every disappointment, every sorrow, every failure, and every cross we have to bear and from them, bring about something beautiful, wonderful, and new. From "death", we are more alive than we were before.

When Jesus shouts, **"Lazarus, come out!"**, he's actually saying that to us too, no matter how unbelievable that sounds. He's inviting us to let him do what he so desperately wants to do, make us the persons he created us to be. This story gives us great hope. We see Jesus' love and we are called to love like him. We see him forgive and we are called to forgive. We see him heal and we are called to heal. We see him show compassion and mercy and understanding and we are called to, well, you get the idea. We see Jesus at work in this miraculous story, and we find ourselves wondering



what exactly we are being called to imitate.

Stop and wonder: are we really making this world a better place, or are we making it less than it could be? Are we able to build others up more than tear them down? Give them hope more than give them reasons to be cynical about life or be lukewarm in matters of faith. Are we able to forgive more than judge, affirm more than we criticize, or give more than we take? Put another way, are we holding others down and holding them back? Are we someone who keeps others bound and keep others behind a stone to block their path? Or can we be their way out from whatever it is that is weighing them down or causing them sorrow, or sapping their spirits? Now, I'm not talking about enormous, dramatic ways we can fail to assist others on their journeys and fail to be the people others truly need us to be. No, I'm talking about the countless small ways we often fail to reach out to others, fail to give them hope and comfort and affirmation and fail to pick them up from whatever is holding them down. In other words, do we bring a little light into the darkness of others, bring a little hope into their despair, bring a little "life" into whatever little "death" they are going through? Or do we just stand at a distance, refusing to roll away the stone, refusing to call out to them, refusing to reach out and help untie what binds them?

My friends, we have a choice, a choice each and every day, a choice to be life-givers or not, people who share with others the grace we have been gifted with or not, people who extend their hands in love to others or not. Who will we be? The invitation this Sunday, as we reflect on the last few weeks, is to come to the living water like the woman at the well. The invitation is to regain spiritual sight like the man blind since birth. The invitation is to rise from the dead like Lazarus. My friends, let's ask ourselves, what are the areas in our lives that are like a corpse? What are the areas in our spiritual life that are tied up, unable to move like a body confined to a grave? Let's ask ourselves: what is the stone that is blocking us from resurrection and new life? That shout to Lazarus to "Come out!" was a shout meant not just for one but for all. It was a shout meant to alert us that things were about to change.

Come out from behind your losses, your fears, your despairs, your unsettled griefs. Come out from your too-long winters and your weeks full of too much suffering. Come out now! Jesus is saying to come out and live, and don't settle for crocuses. Don't settle for pale signs of spring. Don't even settle for spring itself, for it is only a foreshadowing of what is yet to come. Next week is Palm Sunday! It is not too late to be ALIVE!

Deacon Dave