

## **4<sup>th</sup> Sunday before Advent 31-10-2021 All Saints**

### **Readings:**

Isaiah 25:6-9

Revelation 21:1-6<sup>a</sup>

John 11:32-44

### **Sermon:**

The Gospel reading for today begins with verse 32 of chapter 11. Verses 1-31 are an integral part of this story and tell of the death of Lazarus of Bethany. Lazarus, Mary, and Martha were brother and sisters. They were all three friends of Jesus, not to be mixed up with the poor Lazarus we know from Luke's Gospel.

When Lazarus got sick, Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus, hoping that he would come quickly and heal Lazarus. Jesus delayed, however, so that Lazarus died before Jesus arrived in Bethany. Jesus explained to his disciples, "This sickness is not to death, but for the glory of God, that God's Son may be glorified by it" (11:4).

Upon arriving in Bethany, Martha went out to see him while Mary stayed at home to mourn. Martha said to Jesus (in a tone that must have been both accusatory and hopeful), "Lord, if you would have been here, my brother wouldn't have died. Even now I know that, whatever you ask of God, God will give you" (11:21-22). Jesus responded by promising, "Your brother will rise again" (11:23).

Martha said, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day"—to which Jesus responded, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will still live, even if he dies. Whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (11:24-26). Martha said, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, God's Son, he who comes into the world" (11:27).

With this explanation of the first few verses of chapter 11 the main theme for our story today is put in place. This story is not about healing Lazarus or raising him from the dead. It tells us who Jesus is and what he came into this world for.

While her sister stayed at home, Mary came out to greet Jesus. She fell at his feet; the Greek words used here indicate that she was very emotional; she didn't kneel before him in worship but poured out her grief before his feet: 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews that were with her were also weeping. The Greek word for weeping used here means lamenting loudly which in those days was a ceremonial act during a funeral. And seeing all this lamenting Jesus was greatly disturbed. We don't know what he was disturbed about. Was it because of grief over Lazarus' death or was it anger over the lamenting knowing that Lazarus was going to live?

Then Jesus wants to know where they buried Lazarus and he was taken there. Jesus starts to weep. The Greek uses a completely different word here, not lamenting loudly but weeping quietly for himself. People see that

and interpret it as love for his friend Lazarus. Others were less friendly: 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?' Then Jesus arrives at the tomb and asks to remove the stone. Martha, the sister of Lazarus, warns him: there will be a stench for he has been dead for four days. She underlines here that Lazarus is really dead. And then Jesus steps into his role as Messiah and says to her: 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' This is who Jesus is and what his role here on earth is: proclaiming the glory of God, announcing the start of his Kingdom!

Now the tomb is opened, the stone is taken away. Jesus prays to the Father. He even doesn't ask to raise Lazarus but he says he does all this in front of the crowd: '...so that they may believe, Father, that you sent me.' And with a loud voice he calls Lazarus out of the tomb and tells the people in the crowd to 'unbind him.' He makes sure that they can hear and see what is happening and even let them take part in the whole thing by taking the grave cloths of Lazarus.

If we look closely at this story we see details that are very much related to Jesus' own story yet to come. Jesus is dead like Lazarus and both of them were really dead; they were buried in a tomb for several days, the tomb being a cave in the rocks, closed off with a big stone, both lying in there rapped in strips of cloth. And both stories are there to glorify God and show that the Father and Jesus, both being God, have power over life and death. Lazarus was revived in front of a crowd to let them believe; Jesus was raised from the dead to let people believe in God and in the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Knowing this we can now see the relationship between this story and the two other readings we saw today. First of all the text of Isaiah. Isaiah describes a luxurious feast with rich food filled with marrow and with well-matured wines strained clear, a feast for all people. And during this feast the shroud that is cast over all people will be destroyed, which means people will be made free and God will swallow up death for ever: the promise of eternal life and without grief and sorrow, the tears wiped from all our faces, the disgrace of his people taken away from all the earth. A party that symbolizes the new world, the new life in the Kingdom of God.

And there is the link with the reading from the Book of Revelation, chapter 21 beginning with these words: 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, adorned for her husband.'

And then John describes what this new world entails: the home of God will be among mortals. The people and God will live together in one home. God will dwell with the people, he will be with them for ever. He will wipe every tear from our eyes (Isaiah foretold the same thing!) and death will be no more. And from his throne God says: 'See, I am making all things new.'

This is what the Gospel is all about! This is what Jesus came to the earth for! The creation of a totally new world, no grief and sorrow, no mourning

and crying and pain, death will be no more. God's Kingdom, heaven and earth brought together.

His whole life Jesus tried to explain this to his disciples and to the people in general. Many didn't understand. The Kingdom of God beginning right here and now, if only we can believe in it. A message to be spread all over the world.

Now we can see why these readings are so fitting for today, All Saints Day. In God's new Kingdom we all will be saints. And not only in the future but right now we are 'saints', if we only believe that message of Christ and help to spread it over the whole world.

Let us pray that God will give us the courage to believe in Jesus' message. Amen.