

Your Holy Friend of the Month

Peter Claver

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Through Dead to Glory

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Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

(Jn 11: 17,21-27, 32-44)

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

Martha answered,

“I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

Jesus wept.

Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. “Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

Peter Claver left his homeland of Spain to be a missionary in the New World. He sailed into Cartagena, a rich port city where he was ordained in 1615.

Cartegena was a chief center for the slave trade. 10,000 slaves poured into the port yearly from Africa under conditions so inhumane that one-third died in transit. Although the practice of slave-trading was condemned by Pope Paul III and later labeled “supreme villainy” by Pope Pius IX, it continued to flourish.

Peter Claver’s predecessor, Jesuit Father Alfonso de Sandoval, had devoted himself to the service of the slaves for 40 years before Claver arrived to continue his work, declaring himself “the slave of the Negroes forever.”

When a slave ship arrived, Claver would minister to the ill-treated passengers. After the slaves were shut up in nearby yards to be gazed at by the crowds, Claver walked among them with medicines & food. He gave basic instructions and assured his brothers and sisters of their human dignity and God’s love. During his 40 year ministry, Claver instructed and baptized an estimated 300,000 slaves.

Fr. Claver’s apostolate extended beyond the slaves. He became a moral force in Cartagena. He preached in the city square, gave missions to sailors and traders as well as country missions, during which he lodged in the slave quarters.

After years of sickness, Claver died on September 8, 1654. The city magistrates ordered that he should be buried at public expense and with great pomp.

Peter Claver was canonized in 1888, and Pope Leo XIII declared him the worldwide patron of missionary work among black slaves.

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The spectacular miracle in this Gospel, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, can distract from another important gift, which is found in the last line, when Jesus says, “Untie him.” I notice the tremendous gift hidden in that phrase when I remember how many things tether me to my humanity and blind my sight of God. To be released from that which binds our hearts is perhaps an even better miracle than being raised from the dead.

I often felt sorry for Lazarus. He had begun the joy of eternal life, living in harmony with God, and Jesus called him away to suffer his humanity again. Martha and Mary were comforted by this miracle, but was Lazarus?

Jesus understood how painful it was for Lazarus to lose perfect peace, so he attended to that by saying “Untie him.” Yes, his physical bonds were removed, but Jesus’ gift was more complete than that. I like to think that “Untie him” also attended to Lazarus’ spiritual needs, freeing him from those aspects of humanity that get in the way of loving God completely. Isn’t it possible that through Jesus, Lazarus’ heart was made completely free?

I believe Jesus didn’t just bring Lazarus back to life, but he brought him back to a full life, one with the freedom to love God completely. Do you believe that? If you do, then it’s possible for you to be as free as the resurrected Lazarus. Simply ask to be untied!

Questions for Reflection

- 1 Do I find an image for my hope in life?
- 2 Are there people who have died and have a permanent place in my heart?
- 3 Can I believe in the mystery of the resurrection? Will Jesus also someday call me by my name and call me into a new life?

Daily Ignatian Examen

We invite you to prayerfully reflect:

Presence

Become aware that God’s presence is active at each moment of your life, looking at you with love, desirous of speaking directly to your heart. How do you feel at this moment?

Ask

Ask God for the grace to see the ways God is working in your life.

Gratitude

Be grateful. Thank God for the gifts, both big and small of the day. What are you most grateful for today?

Review

Trust that God is with you at each moment of day, during the good and challenging moments. God never abandons you. What were the good moments of today? What were the greatest challenges of today?

Respond

You are not stuck. Tomorrow is a new day. Ask God to give you the grace to be the loving and generous person you were created to be. What can you do tomorrow to be more generous and loving?

Conclude with the Sign of the Cross.

The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father, Who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come. Thy Will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

The Death of Jesus

Mark 1: 16-20

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”

The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.

Questions for Reflection

1 How does Jesus look at me when I imagine him on the cross?

2 What do I want to say to him?

3 What is my cross in my life?

4 Is there anything I want to give from my life to the crucified Lord?

And lead us not into temptation

What do you think when you read or recite these words, “And lead us not into temptation”. Could God actually lead us into temptation? Doesn’t this go against all we believe about a Loving, caring God?

Well, fear not! God cannot be tempted. St. James states in his letter (1:13) “Surely God, who is beyond the grasp of evil, tempts no one.” God does not put the faithful to the test; rather, we often put God to the test by doubting him, as the wandering, weary Israelites did in the desert at Massah.

A better way to interpret the above phrase is, “Do not allow us to enter” or “Do not let us yield to” temptation. When we think this way, we realize that we need divine assistance to lead a good life because, as humans, our efforts are not enough to eliminate temptation. We need to persevere continuously, and this can be exhausting. St. Paul (Corinthians 10:12-13) states that “He (God) will not let you be tested beyond your strength. Along with the test, he will give you a way out of it so that you may be able to endure it.”

God’s love can be found in this exhortation when we realize that God is calling us to come to him, away from temptation. St. John of Avila states, “All that God decrees is that you confide in him, that you draw near him, that you trust him and distrust yourself, and so be helped.” Temptation is never intended by God. But, given our free will, it is permitted. And, if we choose to draw near to God, we are practicing virtue and self-mastery.

The Catholic Church, in its Catechism from the Council of Trent, states that “human life is one continuous temptation ... We pray that divine assistance may not forsake us, lest ... we should yield to temptation, and that the grace of God may be at hand ... when our strength fails, to refresh and invigorate us in our trials.”

So, rest assured that our loving God is always with us, helping us to move toward the light and away from the darkness of temptation.