

ALL SOULS' DAY (2020)

The Church throughout the world observed the beautiful feast of All Souls on Monday, November 2nd. Mass was celebrated both in the morning, and again in the evening—at the evening liturgy, the names of our deceased parishioners from the past year were read aloud. The Gospel related the famous exchange between Jesus and St. Martha, just before Jesus raised her brother, Lazarus, from the dead. The text of Fr. Brian's homily follows:

A. Martha's Sadness

- one of the frustrations many people find in picking up the Scriptures or in hearing them read at Mass is that the world they describe is so completely *foreign* to us
- living in 21st century America, we could hardly be more removed from the period in which Jesus lived; we know so little of the language, the customs, the geography, the religious practices, the food, the clothing, the architecture, the business environment, the legal system, the government, the values or the mindset of these people
- but on the other hand, sometimes the characters in these pages experience things that are *so universal*, it doesn't take any effort for us to understand, even 2000 years later and half a world away
- like Martha, in [today's] Gospel, for instance
- none of us needs the help of a Scripture scholar to make sense of what Martha is feeling; many of us could probably step right into her skin, if we were able, and understand precisely what her heart is struggling with
- her brother, Lazarus, is dead . . .
- her only brother, one of the treasured people in her life, is gone--taken by some illness that the Gospel doesn't name, sealed up now in the silence of the family tomb
- Martha's brother is dead; and *we know* what that feels like--how many of us haven't been visited by the same kind of sadness, how many of us haven't felt the same tears run down our own faces?

B. Do You Believe This?

- we may not know every detail about Martha, or Lazarus, or the world in which they lived, but this family's sadness shouldn't seem far away at all
- so, just for [tonight], why not remove Lazarus' name from the story, and replace it with a name more familiar to you? . . . I could substitute my dad's

name, Raymond . . . you could choose the name of a child, or a parent, a sister or brother, a spouse, a grandparent, a friend

- feel the centuries evaporate as now it's not only Martha standing near the grave, but *you*, remembering the one you loved so much and perhaps still miss so desperately, wincing inside at the pain of having had to say good-bye when you weren't ready for good-bye's
- you turn your eyes, like Martha, to glance for a moment at the tomb; there is nothing but silence there; the stone is heavy across the entrance—so final, so immovable; the one you loved is gone
- but suddenly, *there is someone else standing alongside*, a beautiful face, so familiar and reassuring; and you're startled at first to notice that he, too, is crying--crying for Lazarus, his friend, crying too for the person *you* have lost
- he smiles through his own tears, and taking your hands in his own, he insists that where there seems to be only darkness and loss, hope still lives: **"I am the resurrection and the life: whoever believes in me, though he should die, will come to life; and whoever is alive and believes in me will never die."**
- then he asks a question; you may not be ready for questions, but he asks anyway; he says, **"Do you believe this?"**
- well . . . do you?
- do you believe that because of Jesus, death has no more power over us, that we are heirs to a kingdom where there is no cancer, no COVID-19, no suicide, no strokes, no Alzheimer's, no automobile accidents, no heart disease—a kingdom where love will be our food and every tear will be wiped away?
- can you stretch your heart to believe that the souls of just people, good people, ordinary people like my dad, or your sister, or your husband, or your grandmother are not snuffed out when life ends but cradled in the hand of God, there to be clothed in a glory too beautiful for words?
- do you believe that even now, that person whose face you can *still see*, the person you miss so terribly, whose memory brings tears to your eyes and a too-familiar emptiness to your heart, do you believe that that person is *dancing* in the arms of Jesus, waiting to see you again, praying that your heart will not shrivel with grief but remain warm and strong until your reunion?
- do you believe all of this? perhaps it's a struggle, especially when there seems to be nothing but silence and heartache, and an empty chair at the table
- may the prayers of our sister, Martha, help us to make her words our own: **"Yes, Lord, I *have* come to believe . . ."**