

# **The Sunday Gospel**

## **Fifth Sunday of Lent (Year A)**

### **John 11:20-44 (John 11:1-45)**

<sup>11:20</sup> When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home.

<sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

<sup>22</sup> But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.'

<sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'

<sup>24</sup> Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.'

<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,

<sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'

<sup>27</sup> She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

<sup>28</sup> When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.'

<sup>29</sup> And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

<sup>31</sup> The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

<sup>32</sup> When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'

<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

<sup>34</sup> He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.'

<sup>35</sup> Jesus began to weep.

<sup>36</sup> So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!'

<sup>37</sup> But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

<sup>38</sup> Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.

<sup>39</sup> Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.'

<sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?'

<sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me.'

<sup>42</sup> I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.'

<sup>43</sup> When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!'

<sup>44</sup> The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go.’

### **Broader Picture:**

The raising of Lazarus in Gospel of John 11 sits at a crucial turning point in the Gospel’s narrative and theology.

Many scholars see John structured in two main parts:

1. Book of Signs (chapters 1–11): Jesus reveals himself through signs.
2. Book of Glory (chapters 13–20): Jesus reveals his glory through the Cross, Resurrection, and exaltation.

The Lazarus narrative stands right on the threshold between these two sections, and it is the final and greatest of the signs.

Earlier signs show increasing authority: water turned to wine, healing the sick, feeding the multitude, giving sight to the blind. But here Jesus confronts death itself. The sign is therefore not simply a miracle of compassion, it is a revelation of who Jesus truly is: *“I am the resurrection and the life.”*

## Interpretation Notes:

**v.21 and 32:** “*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died*”. Both sisters use the same words when they meet Jesus. Early commentators see in these words an imperfect faith, but is that the case? Could it be both faith and frustration?

Martha seems frustrated (even upset with Jesus), but still believing as she says, “*But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him*” (v. 22). Her relationship with Jesus is strong enough to take these emotions and words, which comes from spending time with him... from being his friend.

**v.25:** “*I am the resurrection and the life...*” Jesus uses the I AM form. The statement is quite matter-of-fact but not spoken by a mad-man. The evangelist tells us that it is spoken with divine authority. Jesus is **the** life, and, as he says so, we are reminded of the opening St John’s gospel where we read, “*in him was life, and the life was the light of all people*” (John 1:4).

**v.25:** “*will never die*”. Literal translation “shall not die to the age” (by extension, “for ever”). These words should be seen in the context of the life Jesus comes to bring, which is super-abundance of life (Cf. John 10:10), and the “*life of the ages*” (John 6:40). The idea here, although translated as “eternal life”, is not some undefined, endless life to be looked forward to in heaven, but a life that begins here-and-now when we begin to follow Christ; that is not broken by death, but continues in Jesus; and that culminates in the resurrection on the last day.

In the Roman Preface of the Dead we read “*for your faithful, Lord, life is changed, not ended*”. According to St John’s interpretation of eternal life we begin to live that life in the present world. Yes, death changes things. But so will the resurrection. The life Jesus gives endures through all these changes – this **is** super-abundant life.

**v.33, 35, 38:** “*He was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved*”. The sight of Mary crying, and the Jews also crying, Jesus becomes agitated and sorrowful. He eventually breaks down and cries.

St John tells us three times in five verses about Jesus’ emotional state. What does that tell us? Early commentators, embroiled in countering heresies about the person of Jesus, tend to downplay what Jesus goes through because, reading this, one could make the case that Jesus was just human. However, this idea is completely refuted by Jesus’ “prayer” before raising Lazarus (v. 41-42).

**v.36-37:** “*See how he loved him!*”. The word for love is *ephilei*, from *philos*, “to be friend of” and desiring the good of the beloved. Think of the name Theophilus, meaning friend/lover of God or loved by God. *Philos* has an element of intimacy and affection attached to it; it’s not just mate.

Some of Jesus’ opponents are moved by this display of emotions in Jesus. There is a moment of shared humanity here between Jesus and them. However, others are quick to turn this against him, remarking that Jesus could have save Lazarus from death. The implication here is that if Jesus really loved his friend, then he should have been there for him. In other words, if Jesus loved him so much, then why did he heal a stranger (the blind man in John 9), but he was not there for Lazarus?

From a purely emotional viewpoint, you can imagine, what damage such a remark could do to someone already grieving.

**v.41-42:** “I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here”. Jesus’ prayer is not a petition to the Father to raise Lazarus. The whole scene has a whiff of stage whispering from Jesus – it is something Jesus says to show his union with the Father. See these verses,

*‘Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. <sup>20</sup>The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. <sup>21</sup>Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomsoever he wishes. (John 5:19-21)*

## Questions for this week:

- *Martha says: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."*  
Have I ever spoken honestly to the Lord in grief or disappointment like this?
- *The Gospel tells us that Jesus wept.*  
What does it mean to me that the Son of God enters fully into human sorrow?
- *Jesus says: "Take away the stone."*  
What stones in my life still keep me closed in – fear, resentment, shame, despair?
- *Jesus cries out: "Lazarus, come out!"*  
Where might Christ be calling me personally to step out of darkness into new life?



Scripture quotations are from *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Interpretation Notes by Father Diego Galanzino for *The Sunday Gospel* – A discipleship group of the Parish of All Saints' Houghton Regis, March 2026. [allsaintshr.co.uk/learning](http://allsaintshr.co.uk/learning)