

A piece that people often want read at funerals I minister at is called: 'Death Is Nothing At All.' I'm sure a lot of you are familiar with it.

A great deal of my ministry is spent with bereaved families who have little or no Christian faith at all but, when it comes to the death of someone they love, they want their death to be marked before God.

They feel they need God, even if that desire isn't expressed in so many words: in their time of grief, they feel the need for God.

They know that death is certainly not nothing at all; but by having that piece read at the funeral, it helps them to cope with their loss.

Although it is such a caricature of what death is really like, it's not my place to tell them they can't have it, but to lead them to glimpse instead the promise of eternal life found in Jesus.

For a few minutes, let's reflect on that life-giving truth as we look at the Lord's reactions in the Gospel to the reality of death.

When faced with the death of His dear friend Lazarus: "A deep anger welled up within [Jesus]." Jn. 11: 33

Anger: anger that, through the actions of the Devil and all his works, death has entered this wonderful world.

The Devil, who tempted Adam to sin, for: "When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned." Rm. 5: 12

Then, going to the place where Lazarus had lain stone-cold dead for four days: "Jesus wept." Jn. 11: 35

John, an eye-witness to these events, then tells us: "Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance. 'Roll the stone aside,' Jesus told them."

Jn. 11: 38 – 39

Jesus, in raising Lazarus from the dead, ignites the train of events that led to His being laid in a cave-tomb with a stone rolled across its entrance on Good Friday.

For, as John says, after the news of the miracle reached Jerusalem: "From that day on [the High Priest and the Pharisees] planned to kill [Jesus]." Jn. 11: 53

What an awesome, magnificent experience to have been there, and seen Jesus facing the tomb, and commanding: "Lazarus, come out!" Jn. 11: 43

However, let's never forget that – yes – it was a manifestation of the glory of the Lord, but it also showed the awfulness of death.

Martha, the sister of Lazarus, recoils at the thought of the stone being rolled away: "[She] protested, 'Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible.'" Jn. 11: 39

Terrible it most certainly was: but, suddenly, out of the 'Shadowlands,' a body bound in a burial shroud came forth.

Jesus says: "Untie him and let him go free." Jn. 11: 44

The raising of Lazarus is a foreshadowing of the fact that:

"Christ died and rose again for this very purpose – to be Lord both of the living and of the dead." Rm. 14: 9

When another stone was rolled away from another tomb in the Garden of the Resurrection on the first Easter Day, there was no stench of death because Jesus has conquered death.

And for that very reason, I can honestly say that I'm not afraid of death.

When I close my eyes in the sleep of death, I know that when I awaken on the other side of death, Jesus will be there to lead me into eternal life.

**But, you know, we can be spiritually dead – and that’s far worse than physical death – even if in the world’s eyes we’re living
la dolce vita – the good life.**

We can be among the living dead because our life has lost its purpose, our spirit is deadened, we’re trapped by sin, and we don’t know and love God.

These are the people who live in tombs – and some of them are Christians – these may not be tombs of stone, but tombs they most certainly are and, from these tombs Jesus calls us to come forth.

When we place ourselves into the hands of Jesus, then He’ll liberate us from our: “Bondage to decay and death and [bring] us into the freedom and glory of the children of God.” Rm. 8: 21

That is at the heart of the Services of the Easter Triduum we, in a short time, will be coming together to celebrate as the brothers and sisters of Jesus in the family of the Church.

The history of the Church, and of every Parish, is filled with the empty tombs of those who’ve been brought to new life in Jesus.

Jesus is THE Resurrection and THE Life: but He’s more than that; He’s MY Resurrection and MY Life. I pray that this Easter He’ll be yours too.

Then, just maybe, this church will be your Bethany where you’ll be called to new life by Jesus.