

Do you know what the shortest verse in the entire Bible is?

It's in today's Gospel, and it's: "Jesus wept." Jn. 11: 35

When you read, or hear read to you, this account of the Raising of Lazarus, it's so easy to, subconsciously, reach the end of the story even before it starts.

We've heard it so often that, like an oft-read book, we know the ending off by heart.

It's a bit like an Agatha Christie detective story in that the 'Baddy' – Satan – under the guise of death, is

defeated by the 'Goody' – Jesus – who is: "The Resurrection and the Life." Jn. 11: 25

All's well that ends well. It's a happy ending.

But is it? Is there much more going on here than is visible on the surface?

Yes, there is; and the pivotal point in this account is that shortest verse: "Jesus wept."

If Jesus is: "The Word [who] became flesh." Jn. 1: 14 then, surely, He knew that the Father had given Him the power and authority to raise the dead; so why weep?

Some sceptics would say that Jesus was only a man – not God in the flesh – so, of course, He would weep at the death of His friend.

Then they go on to say that Lazarus wasn't really dead, only in a coma; so, when Jesus shouted: "Lazarus, come out!" Jn. 11: 43 he came round.

Sounds a good argument, doesn't it?

Except, that when Jesus reaches the tomb, and tells them to move the stone from across the entrance, Martha says: "Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible." Jn. 11: 39 People in a coma don't give off the stench of death: only the dead do. In a very hot country, as the Holy Land was, and is, a dead body in a cave tomb sealed up for four days would have given off a veritable tsunami of stench.

Remember, that when the women and Peter and John went on Easter morning to the cave-tomb in which Jesus had been laid, and the entrance sealed, on the evening of Good Friday; there was no stench of death hanging in the air – and no body....Jesus had conquered death, and risen from the dead.

Not having to die again, as Lazarus will later in his life, even though Jesus has brought him back from the sleep of death.

Jesus promises Martha: "Your brother will rise again." To which Martha replies: "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jn. 11: 23 – 24

But the last day hadn't come.

That 'day' will only begin to dawn when Jesus rises from the dead, and those words he spoke to Martha before the tomb of Lazarus come to pass: "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die." Jn. 11: 25 - 26

On 15 May 1910, at which time the body of King Edward VII was lying in state at Westminster, Canon Henry Scott Holland preached a sermon at St Paul's Cathedral entitled: 'Death, The King Of Terrors.'

In it appears that poetic piece – 'Death Is Nothing At All' – so often chosen to be read at funerals as a comfort to the mourners.

It's taken completely out of context because, through that piece, Scott Holland, was illustrating how so many people try to sanitise death by making it seem to be 'Nothing At All:' in fact, he asserts it's the 'King Of Terrors.'

So, we must never say, like the Stoics [of old] that death doesn't matter; nothing is less Christian than that. Death, which made Jesus – Life Himself – shed tears at the grave of Lazarus, is an appalling horror; a – literally – stinking indignity; and yet, somehow or other infinitely good.

Christianity doesn't simply affirm or deny the horror of death; it tells us something completely new about it.

The truth about death, which the Church has steadfastly handed down to us from the Apostles – the eye-witnesses to the Death and Resurrection of Jesus – is that of one grand miracle.

The Christian assertion that what is beyond all space and time, what is uncreated, eternal came into nature, into human nature, descended into His own universe, and rose again, bringing nature up with Him.

As Paul says in Philippians: “When [Jesus] appeared in human form he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honour and gave him the name above all other names.” Phil. 2: 8 – 9

It is precisely one great miracle: if you take away the Resurrection of Jesus, there’s nothing’s specifically Christian left.

There are seven miracles in John’s Gospel – ‘ signs ‘as he calls them – to show us the divinity of Jesus through His healing the sick, His power over the forces of nature, and by raising Lazarus from the dead.

But why only seven ‘signs?’ Well, in the Jewish understanding of God, seven is the perfect number because it reflects the perfection of God.

Think of the seven days of Creation in Genesis where God created everything there is, and: “Looked over all he had made, and saw that it was very good!” Gen. 1: 31

When we’re faced with death, the Devil weaves into our minds the idea that our loving, perfect Jesus, if He really cared for us, wouldn’t let this happen.

How wrong he is, as usual: Jesus can’t bear to sit and watch the bereaved being fooled.

We have to understand that Jesus didn’t raise Lazarus from the dead primarily for the for the sake of the dead Lazarus: He raised him for the sake of the living.

“Lazarus, come out!” Jn. 11: 43 Jesus shouted.

Martha, Mary, and the mourners were silent; no one stirred as Jesus stood face to face with the rock hewn tomb, and demanded that it release His friend.

No one stirred, that is, except for Lazarus. Deep within the tomb, He moved.

His stilled heart began to beat again. His eyes, wrapped by graveclothes, opened. Stiffened fingers lifted, and a mummified man in a tomb sat up at the voice of Jesus: “And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in graveclothes, and a cloth around his face.” Jn. 11: 44

And the same voice, which awakened the corpse of Lazarus from the sleep of death, will speak again, and raise us from our graves to eternal life with Him.

Just as He promised He would through these words of Paul in Romans: “Even though your body is subject to death... the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.” Rm. 8: 10 – 11

“I am the resurrection and the life. [Jesus says] Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” Jn. 11: 25 - 26