

The Fifth Sunday of Lent
April 2, 2017

It may get lost in the lengthy narration of today's Gospel, but there's something interesting and significant in Martha's interaction with Jesus. While the Gospels don't make a big deal about the fact, it's usually women who push Jesus to more: the Syrophenician mother argued for a cure for her daughter; Jesus' mother called for wine before "his hour;" and on this occasion, Martha and Mary both let him know, "If you had been here, our brother would not have died."

Now if we can remember the Gospel readings from the last two Sundays, Martha too progressed in her understanding and faith in the same way as the Samaritan woman at the well and the blind man at the pool of Siloam.

And Martha didn't stop with what Jesus hadn't done, she added her own open-ended request: "I know that God will do whatever you ask."

So far Martha had recognized Jesus as a dear friend, a late-coming healer and one whose prayers get answered.

When Jesus told her that Lazarus would rise, she heard that as a traditional teaching many Jews believed, including the Pharisees, that there would be a final resurrection.

Explaining that her understanding encompassed only a tiny portion of God's offer he said, "I am the resurrection and the life ... Do you believe this?"

Martha responded that she did believe he is the Christ. Sound familiar? She didn't say she understood it, just that she believed. So, Jesus took her one step farther, he took her to face the grave.

Raising Lazarus became the sign that in him, death has no power. Believing in Jesus, walking with him with more trust than understanding, is the journey of every disciple, the path of living in the light of Christ, who is the resurrection and the life.

Lent is a season that allows us to face the many different tombs that life has set before us: whether it's a death that ends earthly life, or that severs a relationship or that strangles the spirit.

Lent calls us to look at death and then look squarely into the face of the One who says, "I am the resurrection and the life."

As we approach the end of Lent we're invited to answer Jesus' question, "Do you believe this?" Can we profess our faith in the risen Lord who broke the chains of death and walked away from the grave into the dawn of a new age that will never end?

Like Martha and Mary, we too experience difficult and sometimes seemingly impossible situations in life, and very often we cry out to Jesus to help. Our Gospel today reminds us that Jesus is with us at the times we feel the most lost, disappointed and abandoned.

As we draw closer to Holy week may we be able to truly unite all of the suffering in our lives with the sufferings of Christ, and open our hearts to experience the healing and life-giving presence of Christ in new and even unexpected ways.