

2025-07-20: 4th Sunday of Abib - Raising of Lazarus

Introduction

Why did the Lord weep?

In the beginning of the gospel, the Lord said:

"This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

And later he explained it to the disciples:

"Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I might wake him up."

So if the Lord knows that He will perform a miracle, and He knows that Lazarus will live and walk again, then why did the Lord weep?

Of course, the Lord loved Lazarus - but His tears were not simply for His friend's death, but for death itself.

St Cyril of Alexandria says: "The Jews thought that Jesus wept on account of the death of Lazarus, but in fact He wept out of compassion for all humanity, not mourning Lazarus alone but all of humanity, which is subject to death, having justly fallen under so great a penalty."

In the Liturgy, we will hear Abouna say: "And death which entered into the world through the envy of the devil, You have destroyed"

Death entered into the world, through the envy of the devil... What is death? Sin is death.

The Lord is weeping not for his friend's death, but for death itself. For sin. For humanity's fallen nature.

When I am in sin, I am dead. If sin is separation from God, and God is Life, then when I separate myself from Life, I am dead. When I am far from God, I am dead. When I am far from Light, I am in darkness and the shadow of death. But when I repent from the sin, I am raised again to life.

The Lord wept for death and He told His disciples - "Lazarus is dead." God forbid that I hear these words from the mouth of the Lord about myself "Morcous is dead" - God forbid.

Three Resurrections

In the four gospels, the Lord raised three people from the dead. Three miracles of raising the dead performed by the Lord in the gospels:

- The raising of Jairus' daughter
- The raising of the son of the Widow of Nain
- The raising of Lazarus

The Fathers see these three Resurrections as symbolizing our Resurrection from Sin at its various stages.

The Resurrection of Jairus' daughter happened when she had just fallen asleep. She was not even removed from her house yet. It's right after she died, that the Lord came and raised her. This represents the beginning stage of sin.

The Resurrection of the Son of the Widow of Nain happened after he had died, and was taken out of his home and carried in a coffin, but not yet buried. At this time, the Lord came and raised him. This represents the next stage of sin. I am dead, I am on the way to be buried. Sin is growing and it is hiding, as the young man was hidden in the coffin.

The Resurrection of Lazarus happened after he had died, was taken out of his home, carried to a tomb and buried in it, and then left for four days. The Gospel tell us - "there was a stench." At that time, the Lord came and raised him. This represents the last stage of sin - I am dead, buried, and am corrupted to the point that "there is a stench" that everyone around me can smell.

St James also tells us about various stages of sin: "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." (James 1:14-15)

Maybe I am in the beginning stage of sin - I heard about a sin, I am considering doing it, I tried it once. I did it on accident. I was pressured into doing it. I am like Jairus' daughter who was JUST pronounced dead a few minutes ago.

Maybe I am at a further stage - I have repeated the sin more than once, I am hiding it from my Father of Confession. I am like the son of the widow - dead and on the way to be buried.

Maybe I am at an even further stage - I am living the sin, I am not ashamed or embarrassed of it, I am encouraging others to do it or teaching them how. I am like Lazarus - I am dead, buried in the tomb, and there is a stench.

At all three stages, I am dead... I need repentance. And the later the stage, the deeper I am in sin, the more difficult it will be for me to come out of it.

Let's Take some Examples:

Gambling

- My friend told me about an app and I used it and then I found out it's gambling and it's a sin. This is still early stages. Jairus' Daughter
- Well even after I found out that it is gambling and it's a sin, I continued to do it. I made some money, I'm happy with the money! Everyone else is doing it, why not? It's not gambling if you do

research, right?! Now sin is at the next level. The son of the widow of Nain.

- Now I'm teaching others how to play. I don't think what I'm doing is wrong... whoever said it was a sin didn't know about it. Now sin is at the last level - Lazarus.

The same can be said of any sin - lying, cheating, lust, anger, jealousy.

These are stages of sin that the Fathers see in these three dead people - but what unites these three stories, and what makes them miracles, is that the Lord RAISED all of them. He is the Resurrection and the Life, as He told Martha today.

See this icon how we see the Lord trampling on the serpent. The serpent here represents death. As we pray in the Thanksgiving Prayer - "It is You who have given us the authority to trample on serpents, scorpions, and upon all the power of the enemy." So we see who else trampling on the serpent and on death? Jairus' daughter.

No matter what I am struggling with, the Lord is able to raise me out of it. No matter how new it is, how old it is, how deep I am, how much I stand to lose, how much people know or don't know, the Lord can bring me out of it. He can raise me from the death of sin.

Let me ask myself - what is it that I am struggling with? What is it that I am keeping from my Father of Confession? What is it that I can't seem to shake, or that I've become addicted to? The Lord can bring me out of it.

How?

The Lord Seeks Our Repentance

Lazarus was dead in Bethany, but the Lord at the time was beyond the Jordan. But the Scripture tells us that He said to the disciples "Let us go to Judea again." Even though at this point in His Ministry, it was dangerous to go to Judea, the Lord tells them "Let us go to Judea again." He is seeking out Lazarus. He is seeking to raise him from the dead and into life.

Throughout the Holy Scripture, we see the Lord seeking the repentance of those who fall.

- Adam
 - Starting even from Adam... After Adam and Eve had eaten from the tree, the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, 'Where are you?'
 - Does the Lord not know where Adam is? Of course He does, He is All-Knowing... so why is He asking? He gives Adam a chance to confess. A chance to say "Lord, I made a mistake." - "Lord you gave me one commandment." - "Lord I was weak and I fell and I need You to pick me up."
 - But Adam responds: "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."
 - Does the Lord leave him at that? No, he asks him again - "Who told you that you were naked?" - Confess! - "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" Confess!
 - See how the Lord continues to seek his repentance.

- And so Adam confesses - The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate. He blames Eve, he blames God, but it's a confession.
 - So the Lord moves on to Eve - "What is this you have done?" And Eve confesses right away - "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."
 - The Lord Seeks our Repentance.
 - St Gregory the Theologian in the Divine Liturgy, puts himself in the place of Adam and prays to the Lord, You have created me. You formed me. You laid Your hand upon me. You inscribed in me the Image of Your Authority. You gave me the gift of speech. You opened for me Paradise to enjoy.
 - And then "of one plant have You forbidden me to eat, that of which You have said to me, 'of it only do not eat.'"
 - And St Gregory gives us the confession: "But according to my will, I did eat. I put Your law behind me by my own counsel, and became slothful toward Your commandments. I plucked for myself the sentence of death."
 - There's that word again - death. Sin is death. But the Lord seeks our repentance
- Cain
 - And He didn't just do this with Adam, but in the next chapter with Cain when He asked him "Where is your brother?" and Cain responds "Am I my brother's keeper?"
- King David
 - With King David when He sent to him Nathan the Prophet
 - Nathan told him a story about a rich man and a poor man, and when a traveler came, the rich man took all that the poor man had and gave it to the traveler
 - So King David was enraged! He said that man shall surely die!
 - Nathan told him "You are the man!" - It's you that is in this story because you took all that Uriah the Hittite had
 - And David's response was "I have sinned against the Lord" - and King David in his repentance prayed and chanted and wrote many psalms.
 - This is the answer the Lord is looking for from us - and we can take and use those psalms that King David wrote, like Psalm 50 the Psalm of Repentance.
- Nineveh
 - When the Lord sent Jonah to Nineveh - He was seeking their repentance.
- St Peter
 - With St Peter when He asked him "Simon Bar Jonah, do you love Me more than these?"

The Lord seeks my repentance. Every day that I wake up is a new chance the Lord is giving me for repentance.

The Lord Calls For Me

"Lazarus, come forth!"

Let me put my name in this verse and take it as a message to myself. The Lord is calling for me by name. Am I listening?

The Lord calls for me through the Church:

- Through my Father of Confession - when my Father of Confession gives me advice, or gives me a spiritual canon, or gives me guidance... this is the Lord speaking through him.
- Through my servants - my Sunday School Servants or my Youth Meeting servants. When my servant comes to me and says what you're doing is wrong - it is not pleasing to the Lord, it is not fitting for you as a Christian, you are putting yourself at risk - I take the message as coming from the mouth of God.
- The Lord calls for me through the lessons I hear in Sunday School, or the topics I hear in Youth Meeting. If I am not attending the Youth Meeting, how will I hear His voice and His call for me as a youth?
- The Lord calls for me through the sermons of our fathers the priests in Vespers and in the Liturgy. If I am busy on my phone while Abouna is talking, then I will not hear the Lord's call for me.

The Lord calls for me through His Scriptures:

- The Lord calls for me through my personal readings - when I read the Scripture, and I see myself in place of the Bible Characters, and I see my situations in the Bible stories, and I pray the Lord gives me a personal message, then I will hear Him calling for me.
- The Lord may call for me through the Liturgical Readings - when we read the Pauline, Catholic, Acts, and the Gospel

The Lord may also call out for me through my daily life

- I have the Bible app on my phone and every day it sends a notification to my phone "Daily Bible Verse." I take my finger and swipe right so it can go away - I don't read it, I don't look at it, I just naturally swipe it away. Maybe the Lord is sending me this verse?
- I am scrolling through my Facebook and Instagram - hopefully, if I have social media, then I am following good pages. There are pages that post lives of the saints, that post hymns and liturgies, that post icons, that post verses from the Scripture. And when I see those posts do I keep scrolling? Or do I think to myself - maybe the Lord is sending me a message.

The Lord is calling out for me

The Lord Frees Us

"Loose him and let him go"

Lazarus came out, but he was still in his graveclothes. So the Lord told the people "Loose him and let him go."

It reminds us of when the Lord instituted the sacrament of Confession with the Disciples. He said to them "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 18:18)

What is binding me? What is preventing me from going to confession? The devil tries to trick us with the Sacrament of Confession. We will hear lies like:

- Abouna is too busy
- Abouna might judge me
- I don't have time
- I haven't confessed in a long time, it's too late
- God can't forgive this
- I'm too embarrassed
- I don't need to confess
- I'm ashamed
- I'm afraid
- I can't stop my bad habits

These are graveclothes that we have to remove so that we can be loosed in the Sacrament of Confession.

If I don't receive the sacrament of Repentance and Confession in its completion, and sit with my Father of Confession, then I will continue to be dead.

And this is why the Church arranges for these readings on the 4th Sunday of Epep. We mentioned last week that this month focuses on the ministry of the Apostles and the Lords support for them. One of the gifts of this ministry is the raising of the dead - the raising of the spiritually dead by the Sacraments.

Today, by Gods grace we celebrated the baptism of a blessed family. This baptism is a participation in the Resurrection of Christ. The removal of the old man and the putting on of Christ. But I cannot go and be baptized every week or after every sin. I have the Sacrament of Repentance of Confession and the Eucharist.

As the Lord said about Lazarus, "Loose him" so He also said to the apostles about us - whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven

Action

So we had three points today in how the Lord raises us from the death of sin:

1. The Lord Seeks our Repentance
2. The Lord Calls for Us
3. The Lord Frees Us

So now let me ask myself - what is it that I am struggling with? What is it that I am keeping from my Father of Confession? What is it that I can't seem to shake, or that I've become addicted to?

What is the new sin that I want to make sure it doesn't get worse? What am I holding on to? Let me ask myself these questions, and having faith that the Lord can bring me out of it, let me set an appointment with my Father of Confession.

Maybe it has been a very long time since my last confession. That's okay - the Lord seeks my repentance. The Lord rejoices in my repentance. The Lord is calling for me - all of those messages I've been ignoring, the Gospel Readings, Abouna's sermons, the Sunday School Lessons, the Youth Meeting topics, the Bible verses that come as notifications or come across my feed, - let me take them as messages to repent and confess and receive the Eucharist. And the Lord will set me free.

May the Lord raise us up from the death of sin as He raised Lazarus, and grant us to hear His voice and come forth to the Resurrection of Life.

Glory be to God, forever. Amen.

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