

*It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.*

**Weekly Edition – August 24, 2018**  
**Gospel According to St. John – Third Year**

## Two Sisters, Two Reactions

<sup>17</sup> On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. <sup>18</sup> Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem,<sup>19</sup> and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. <sup>20</sup> When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

<sup>21</sup> "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

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

<sup>24</sup> Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; <sup>26</sup> and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

<sup>27</sup> "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

<sup>28</sup> After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." <sup>29</sup> When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. <sup>30</sup> Now Jesus had not yet entered the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him. <sup>31</sup> When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

<sup>32</sup> When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. <sup>34</sup> "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

<sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.

<sup>36</sup> Then 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?"

### The Gospel of St. John

#### Part I

- Prologue 1:1-14
- First Year 1:15 – 2:22
- Second Year 2:23 – 6:71
- Third Year 7:1 – 12:50

#### Part II

- The Last Discourse 13:1 – 17:26
- The Arrest and Trial 18:1 – 19:16
- Death and Resurrection 19:16 (b) – 21:25

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## Entering Into Scripture: A Meditation on the Sister's Reactions

*There are friends, and there are special friends. There are some with which we hold such a special bond that merely being together seems to enlarge life. No matter how long the passage of time since we have last been together, upon reunion the friendship takes up right where it left off. There is a certain safety, a certain familiarity, a certain comfort in really being known and in knowing. There is that warmth of unconditional acceptance and accepting by the same measure. Lazarus is that kind of friend to me – to all of us.*

*Lazarus was always so happy to see me and I him. I don't really have words to describe the ache of loss or the hole in my life that was Lazarus. As we make our way towards Bethany, all I can think of is how different it will be without him.*

*Now Bethany sits on the southeastern slopes of the Mount of Olives. On the opposite side is Jerusalem. It is less than two miles away. But the slope is steep, and it is a strenuous hike to reach the city. Bethany is a familiar place to us. We often stay in the house of Martha where she lives with her younger sister Mary and Lazarus, her brother, when we come up to Jerusalem. They are like extended family to us, and Lazarus might be regarded as one of us twelve since we share such close kinship. There is a warm affection and genuine intimacy among us. I consider Lazarus to be my brother, and his sisters are my sisters.*

*It is a two-day journey to reach Bethany from Bethany beyond the Jordan. From where we began, a few miles north of the Dead Sea, it is mostly up. We walk at our ordinary pace; leisurely but deliberate. Nothing would indicate any rush or sense of urgency. Jesus is particularly quiet as we go. So are the rest of us. I wonder to myself if He is more concerned about the Judeans and Pharisees than He let on. I know I am concerned, but each time that thought pushes up*

*in my mind it is swept away by the heartache of the death of my friend.*

*We make our way along a well-traveled route. It leads through the desert wilderness which is carpeted in wildflowers this time of year. Although it is winter and the wet season is upon us, it hasn't rained in a couple days. Mid way through our second day the lush green hills of Bethany come into view.*

*Bethany faces to the southeast. Rising above are an elaborate series of ancient terraces. The climate is ideal for agriculture. Nestled onto these terraces are gardens and fields – an assortment of crops and grains; dates, almonds, fig trees and olive groves. Here sheep and goats are raised, many will be used in service at the Temple. The people here are salt of the earth. Laborers. Shepherds. Tanners. There is no great wealth here – only working-class people eking out a living from the land. My people. I am at home here.*

*It has now been four days since Jesus told us our friend, Lazarus, had died. Four days. The thought makes my heart feel heavier, if that were possible. We Jews believe that the soul of the departed hovers near to the grave for three days in the hope of reuniting with the body. But when the fourth day comes, and decomposition sets in, the soul departs never to return. I have never heard of anyone being reunited -soul with body. It doesn't matter. The thought that our friend has now departed for good makes me feel empty. I miss him already.*

*"It's Martha!"*

*I look up ahead to see her. She is dressed head to toe in black mourning robes. She is moving with haste to come to us. She seems, well, not herself.*

*Martha is an exceptional woman. She is pretty, but modest. A person of great character and self-restraint. She is strong, but gentle and exudes a quiet confidence, yet is kind towards all. She runs*

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*an efficient and well-ordered home and manages the household business with great care and frugality. I have only seen her lose it once, when she was upset with her sister, Mary, for not helping out with guests.*

*But now as she stands before us, her sunken eyes tell it all. Deep rings cut into her face expose the magnitude of her loss and the depth of her grief. I begin to well-up.*

*"Martha." Jesus greets her warmly.*

*"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Her words belie her mixed feelings; one-part confession, one-part accusation. She looks into His eyes, as if she is trying to find the right words. Then she adds, "But I know that even now God will give You whatever You ask."*

*Her words startle me. Grief salted with hope. Loss seasoned with expectation. I feel ashamed that I had neither hope or expectation.*

*She steps forward and Jesus draws her into His embrace, her head falls heavy on His shoulder as she quietly weeps.*

*"Martha," Jesus said. His voice was tender. "Your brother will rise again."*

*They let go of each other. Martha looks down. Then after a few moments, she looks up at Jesus. Eyes meet. "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day," she said.*

*"I am the resurrection and the life," Jesus said. "The one who believes in Me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in Me will never die."*

*His words seemed to hang in the air like a sweet perfume. I look around at the faces of the others. Their expressions say it all – some hang on His every word whereas the furled eyebrows of others barely conceal their hostility towards Jesus. A stillness settles over all of us. Martha's eyes seem to brighten up.*

*"Do you believe this?" Jesus asked her.*

*"Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that You are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is even He who comes into the world."*

*I am amazed at her faith. Suddenly I am very much aware of two things: the shallowness of my own faith and how precious this moment is. The magnitude of her statement sinks in. Jesus appears to be well-pleased with her.*

*Jesus speaks again. "Where is Mary?"*

*"She is back at the house with our friends and many visitors," she said adding, "let me go and bring her to You." With that, Martha turned and walked quickly in the direction of their home.*

*Jesus does not follow her, instead choosing to remain in place. At first, it strikes me as odd, but as I think about it more it makes sense. The family is so well-loved that surely the house is packed with friends and relatives mourning with the sisters.*

*Even had we set out two days before, I think to myself, we would have missed the funeral. We Jews bury our dead right away, typically the same day their eyes are closed. The body is lovingly prepared with spices, the head shrouded in a linen veil, the hands and feet wrapped in strips of linen. Then the body is carried to the burial cave in a procession led by the women and mourning wailers. Once the body is carefully laid in the tomb, two lines form, and the family members pass between them as they return home to begin the period of mourning.*

*There, foods prepared by friends will await the family and the daily host of visitors that will come to sit with them in grief. This will last for seven days during which the family members will not leave their house except to visit the tomb. After the initial week has past, it is followed by a year-long period of lighter mourning.*

*"Look here," says one of our companions. I turn to see the sisters coming towards us followed by a throng of mourners. When Mary sees Jesus, her pace quickens. We step aside, making way for her. She falls at the feet of Jesus and clings to*

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*His legs, wailing loudly. I fight to hold back my tears.*

*"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died," she laments. Mary is inconsolable. Hers is a grief that knows only torment with no relief. Her heartbreak is naked with no attempt to conceal it or dampen the pain.*

*Jesus reaches down to her, and gently guides her to her feet. As He stands up I see an expression on His face that is utterly unrecognizable. His eyes are filled with sorrow, but His eyebrows and thinned out lips seem to conceal a forceful anger. His voice betrays agitation as He queries, "Where have you laid him?"*

*Mary is unable to speak. Those with her spoke up, saying, "Come and see, Lord." Then it all seems to flood down upon Jesus, and He begins*

*to weep. And seeing Him weep, and Mary's grief, I collapse into convulsing grief. Tears flood. I let out a deep moan, and I hear others do the same.*

*"See how much He loves him," I overhear. It is some of the visitors from Jerusalem speaking of Jesus. And a new wave of grief washes over the assembly.*

*Slowly the group begins to move, led by some friends so the sisters can walk with Jesus.*

*"Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" I do not see the one who speaks, but I do see heads nod in agreement. My grief is now broken by anxiety. I am reminded of the danger of being here in Judea, and how the authorities want to stone Jesus. I suddenly feel very naked and vulnerable. What are we doing here?*

### Reflection 6: The Ravages of Sin

Contrasted with Martha's movement toward greater faith, Mary and the Jews who accompany her are mired in the darkness of unbelief. Their unrestrained wailing is fixated on death; there is no light of hope to raise them from the death's darkness. Their unbelief weighs so heavily on You that You erupt in anger and are greatly agitated in Your spirit. Your anger is not directed toward them, but towards the fact of unbelief and its result – namely, sin. Unbelief is the condition which allows sin to flourish and sin leads to death. In this moment You come face to

face with the ravages of sin on Your people – the havoc of evil – and Your reaction is to snort an angry outburst and to be deeply disturbed in Your spirit. While it is true that this is the reason for Your earthly mission and the purpose of Your cross – to reconcile us to God – in this moment we witness the magnitude of God's anger towards sin and the depth of God's love for us that the Father would send You, His only Son, to reconcile us to God through Your death and resurrection.

*Application: How closely do I identify with our Lord's anger towards sin?*

### Reflection 7: Come and See

It is ironic they invite You to "come and see." This is normally Your invitation to us. The Psalmist calls out, "Come and see what God has done, His awesome deeds for mankind!" Phillip invited Nathanael to "come and see." At Your tomb, the angel invited the women to "come and see" the now vacant place where Your body had been laid. Two days earlier in the sovereign

knowledge of the all-knowing Godhead, from a remote place at Bethany beyond the Jordan, You beheld the death of Lazarus. Now, in the face of unbelief and the ravages of death, You empty Yourself so completely that You must ask directions to the tomb where Lazarus lay. This "come and see" is a dress rehearsal for that self-emptying that will be demanded of You on the

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cross. You, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to Your own advantage; rather, You emptied Yourself and made Yourself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, You humbled Yourself by

becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! We often think of our crosses as something we must get through. But You do not see it that way. You see them as the place where we are best able to identify with You through our own self-emptying – “My grace is sufficient for you, for *My strength is perfected in weakness.*”

*Application: It is a paradox that God's strength is perfected in my weakness. Where am I striving to be strong instead of striving to embrace my vulnerability, so God's strength can shine through?*

### Reflection 8: Jesus Wept

Lord Jesus, You know the end of the story, so to speak. You know how this will end. You know that nothing will cause Your Father's eternal plan for creation to deviate from its intended course established before the beginning of time. You have promised us many things that are to come, like, for example, “in My Father's house are many rooms” and “if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me” and “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Yet, armed with this knowledge and confidence, coming

face to face with the effects of sin and the ravages of death, Your heart breaks and You weep. Your love of me is so complete, so perfect, so unconditional, that You weep for me – for my aches and pains, for my losses, for my sins, for my hardness of heart and unbelief, for the limits within me to know You more completely or to trust You more surely. Such is Your total, perfect and limitless love of me and every one of Your creatures. All You ask in return from me – from each of us – is that we make a return of love to You.

*Application: How have I experienced God's boundless love of me?*

### Reflection 9: Assumptions and Regrets

Some of those with You ask why it is that Lazarus, the one You love, has died given that You gave sight to man born blind. If You were able to do that, why could You not do this? Were these words spoken in mockery or out of that spirit of “what if” or “only if” that tortures the human heart? We often suffer more from what might have been than we do from the real facts of our circumstances. Some of our greatest pains come from those things we wish would have been true – those circumstances we see in our imagination that would have given us so many supposed benefits, equipped us with certain advantages,

or bettered us in this way or that way – and we grieve and suffer over those imagined losses as if they were actual losses. The resulting regret blinds us to all Your blessings and wonder of our lives here and now. Those imagined losses cause us to sink into a gloomy darkness. The thing that was never real and lives only in our regrets casts a sort of death pall over our here and now – robbing us of the joy and freedom that is ours in You right now in our present circumstances. Instead of counting our blessings we suffer imagined losses, and we are sad and filled with regret. “If only such and such were true, then...”

*Application: What regrets or supposed losses are robbing me of the simplicity of joy and freedom in Jesus in my life right now?*