

“But even if someone should rise from the dead they will not believe.”

Lk 16:31

The timing of today’s Gospel passage – and where this event fits into the public ministry of Our Lord – is significant. The death of Lazarus, and his being raised from the dead, takes place almost at the very end of Our Lord’s public work, just a few days before the very first Palm Sunday when Our Lord rode triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey. In other words, Our Lord has saved the most dramatic miracle till last, and by holding up the death and raising to life again of Lazarus Our Lord is preparing the people around Him for His own death and resurrection. They do not yet know that, but they will think on it afterwards, and understand.

What’s more, although God does not actively will the death of Lazarus, He will use it to reveal the glory of God to those who see: ‘This illness does not lead to death,’ Our Lord says at the beginning of today’s Gospel passage. ‘It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.’ In other words, God directs all things according to His providence so that His divine plan may be fulfilled, even in the face of our sinful contrariness.

In setting the scene for His own death and resurrection Our Lord is preparing His disciples for the supreme moment of divine revelation, and showing them that death is not the end of the story, that death does not have the last word, that death itself is defeated by the power of God.

Yet, in the heart of today’s Gospel account, buried amidst the bustle of everything else that is going on, and almost hidden by the multiple layers of meaning in the words of Sacred Scripture, we come to the shortest verse in the whole Bible: ‘Jesus wept.’

Our Lord weeps first for the death of a beloved friend; then He weeps for the sorrow caused to those who are stricken with grief. In these ways He shows the depths of His humanity and His compassion for the suffering of others. When *you* weep in sorrow, know that Our Lord weeps with you.

Yet we must remember at all times that Our Lord is not just truly Man but truly God also. When He weeps at the tomb of Lazarus He does not only reveal the depth of His humanity, He reveals also the nature of His divinity. Certainly, He weeps at the death of His friend, but He also weeps as the Son of God because His heart is filled with sorrow at the thought that whilst many around Him on that day will indeed believe in Him, still there will be many more who – even seeing the raising to life of a man dead for four days and buried in a tomb – will set their hearts against a God who raises the dead to life. ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,’ cried Our Lord elsewhere. ‘How often would I have gathered together thy children as a hen does gather her chickens under her wings, but thou wouldst not?’ (Mt 23:37).

The Son of God weeps at the unbelief of so many, at the pride of those who refuse to believe, at the cold indifference of the wayward, and at the sins of us all.

We do not deserve the love, and the mercy, and the forgiveness of Almighty God. We do not deserve the tenderness of His tears, and the gentle touch of His hand. We do not deserve that He should come and walk amongst us, and weep *with* us as well as *for* us. We do not deserve that He should suffer for us, and die a wretched death on the ignominious gibbet of the Cross.

And because we do not deserve even to look upon the face of One who was willing to die for us, even the crucifixes are now draped in the solemn purple veils of Passiontide, as are the statues of the angels and the saints who dare not look upon what we have done to our God.

‘Jesus wept.’

Today, at the start of the last two weeks of Lent, we begin the most solemn of all of the Church’s seasons, the mini season of Passiontide, when our thoughts and prayers are focused intently upon the sufferings of the Son of God who takes upon Himself the full weight of the consequences of our sins. The heavy, sombre drapes do not allow us to ignore what these days are all about: here, in church, there is no escaping the reality that it is our sins that have caused the sufferings and death of our Saviour. It is right that our mood becomes sombre in reflection of the Church’s liturgy as we ponder the mysteries of our redemption. But it is right, also, that we know that we can do something about it. As we have heard throughout Lent in the words of St Paul, ‘Now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation’ (2 Cor 6:2).

Through the sublime beauty of the Sacrament of Confession we can be cleansed of our sins of pride and indifference, washed clean once more, and be made to stand ready to look upon the face of One who was stricken for us on the Cross, but who rose again from the dead to give us hope.