

All Saints Day --- Lazarus, come out!

deluded people who held that a person who had died was Resurrected. They said Christians were *atheists* who were likely to be, at the worst, both guilty of *incest* and *cannibalism*. Christians were thought to be atheists because they would prefer arrest and horrible deaths rather than worship pagan gods or the defied emperor; incestuous because they called each other *brother* and *sister*, and gathered for the *agapé*, the feast of love (the Eucharist followed by the frequent parish supper); and, finally, cannibals because they spoke of eating Body and Blood.

Note that Jesus dallies, almost dawdles. "[H]e stayed two days longer" before going to Bethany. When he arrives "Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days". Why does he *deliberately* arrive four days after Lazarus' death? The folk belief was that the soul of the deceased waited around for two days, hoping to reenter the body. One can imagine that the source of this myth may have been the unexpected recovery of people who had lapsed into a coma. Jesus takes his time. He waits four days. He doubles the folk belief. There can be no question in any ones' mind that Lazarus is *really dead!*

Do also consider "**The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth...**"? This may be a second miracle: Lazarus is able to walk out of the tomb despite being bound in grave clothes.

Finally, John's writing may often be seen on more than one level. Today's passage has at least two levels:

Level one Lazarus' sister Martha professes belief in the Resurrection and in Jesus as both the Messiah and as the Son of God. She does not completely connect the four concepts [Jesus = Messiah = Son of God = Resurrection] until she sees her brother rise from the tomb.

Level two In the Resurrections of Lazarus and Jesus, the faithful Christian finds a preview of his/her eternal resurrection at the hand of Jesus, the Messiah, Son of God, and the resurrection that will come to us all on the last great day.

Please prepare Saint Mark 12:38-44 for next Sunday

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Raising of Lazarus (detail)

From "Scenes from the Life of Mary Magdalene"
Giotto di Bondone (c. 1267 – January 8, 1337)
Fresco, executed in the 1320s

Magdalene Chapel, Lower Church, San Francesco, Assisi

Today's Gospel: Saint John 11:32-44

✠WHEN MARY CAME WHERE JESUS WAS AND SAW HIM, SHE KNELT at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha,

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the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” [© NRSV]

Gospel Commentary

Jesus loves the little children/ All the children of the World/ Red and yellow, black and white/ They are precious in his sight/ Jesus loves the little children of the World.

Jesus loves me/ This I know/ 'Cause the Bible tells me so/ Little ones to him belong/ They are weak but he is strong/ Yes, Jesus loves me/ Yes Jesus loves me/ Yes Jesus loves me/ The Bible tell me so....

Now I lay me down to sleep/ I pray the Lord my soul to keep/ If I should die before I wake/ I pray the Lord my soul to take.

Our ideas about God are so often colored by our childhood memories of a one dimensional Jesus, a Jesus who lacked a full range of human emotions. Many Christians, especially us Catholic Christians, were taught to stress Jesus' Divinity, but we often forget his humanity ¹. Jesus is Man/God, humanity and Divinity; God/Man, Divinity and

¹ Many Episcopalians will remember a time not very long ago when there was no sermon at the Early Eucharist. After finishing Sunday School one could go to church for many years, even a lifetime (!), and hear no Christian instruction. It is no wonder that so many childhood ideas persist.

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humanity.. He has all the human emotions and all the Divine attributes.

The word vastly under-translated as "**deeply moved**" appears just five times in the New Testament. The Greek is ἐμβριμάομαι, "em-bri-ma-o-mai" an onomatopoeic word that means "snort like a horse" Our English onomatopoeic equivalent might be *whinny*. Man/God is furious! We could easily call his actions *the wrath of God*. He is appalled by the unbelief of Mary, Martha and her friends who join in mourning at Lazarus' tomb. A few verses before today's passage s he told Mary who he is, and she believed him.

Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

Mary has shown belief followed by doubt. She who has said '*Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world*', now shows her limits of belief. She reveals that she questions the Master. She says, '*If you had been here my brother would not have died*'. The key word to Mary's weak convictions is the word **If**.

We must always attempt to read the Gospels with the eyes and experiences of those who were the original readers. John is mirroring the skepticism of those who criticized the Church at the time of the writing of his Gospel ± 90 AD. The early Christians were a group with mostly Jewish backgrounds, people who had presented themselves for Baptism in the midst of terrible danger, knowing that they might well be murdered by those who had not embraced the Christ. The Church's enemies were people, both Jew and pagan, who scoffed at the Church, They believed and spread malicious rumors about it and felt justified when Christians were executed. The critics believed that the Christians to be a