

Help us to trust You, O Lord *Jesus*, when we see You not, and our way is shadowed by sorrow or doubts *concerning Your gracious care for Your Church; ... in Your ... goodness reveal Yourself to us ... through Your appointed means*, that our hearts may rejoice *once again*, and we may walk henceforth in the light of Your presence; for the glory of Your holy Name. Amen. (Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 88 - *adapted*)

When [Martha] had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to [Jesus]. Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met Him. When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in His spirit and greatly troubled. And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. 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 also have kept this man from dying?"

In Christ Jesus, who came experiencing our sadness even with His tears, dear fellow redeemed:

Most of us have seen the interviews on TV where the person being interviewed is apologetically moved to tears. The interviewer then often reaches out with a touch on the arm and says: "that's OK!" This in turn causes the audience often to respond with tears as well and then conclude that the interview is an effective piece of journalism since it elicited tears. But such tears of sorrow are in a way not "OK". We know that in heaven all such tears will be wiped away, no longer will the difficulties of this life produced on account of our sin trouble us to the point of weeping.

In truth, tears in this life of sorrow are OK and a very natural response for us caught in the midst of this world of sorrow. Jesus demonstrates that in our text as He joined Mary and her fellow mourners who were weeping over the death of Lazarus. The mourners made these observations: "See how [Jesus] loved him!" "Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"

So in the midst of your lives with its many sorrows, find in our text the comfort our Lord desires you always to have and **See How Jesus Loves You, He Keeps You from Dying!**

I

You will remember that Mary and Martha had sent word to Jesus while He was still in Galilee that their brother was gravely ill. To the relief of His disciples, Jesus said He would not be going to Bethany. But after Lazarus had died He announced that they would now be traveling back to Judea, where the last time He had been there the Jews intended to stone Him to death for uttering blasphemy, taking the name of God to Himself.

We know that Jesus from a distance could have willed the healing of Lazarus, as He had done with the Centurion's servant and the official's son. But our Lord desired that Lazarus would fall into the sleep of death, so that the glory of God might be revealed four days after his death by raising him to life again.

Contrary to the conclusion of His detractors who questioned Jesus' love for Lazarus by His failure to keep him from dying, Jesus demonstrated a far greater love for Lazarus and all of us by His refusal to heal him. However, the very act of raising Lazarus from the dead would be the catalyst for the final solution by the unbelieving Jews against this bothersome Jesus of Nazareth. Little did they know that their evil plot would result in Jesus overcoming our accursed death.

The crosses we bear in this life come in all sorts of manifestations. Certainly the sicknesses and deaths of our loved ones are huge crosses to bear. But crosses are found in a wide range of conditions and circumstances: disabilities, mental illnesses, unemployment, poverty, broken relationships, abuse, addictions, crimes, wars, pestilence, plagues, etc. What menacingly hovers over all of them is the realization that sooner or later death will finally come upon us all.

We live in a broken world, which all the ingenuity of mankind can never fix. Yes, we may develop temporary reliefs, but in the end death, which dwells within us from birth, will have its way. Our spiritual enemies know how we can fall for the temptation that God, our Creator, ceases to love us and cause us to at least think, if not utter, curses at Him for sending such crosses in our lives and the lives of our loved ones.

Mary, greeted our Lord, with a mild curse, when she said the same thing Martha had said in her greeting: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." In other words, "*Lazarus*

would not have died, if You had come when we asked You to come. His death, our crosses, would have been averted and removed. You let us down, Jesus."

II

Oh, but He had not let them down at all. His tears showed His love for them all. More than any of the other mourners present that day, Jesus knew how this death-thing was not to spoil His perfect creation and tear apart His most beloved creatures. But death was introduced already in the Garden of Eden and keeps racking up its victims from generation to generation even to our day.

In God's great love for us He did not come with a final solution, but an everlasting solution. He sent His only begotten Son into this world of misery and shame to live the perfect life according to God's holy Law expected of all of us. He did live such a holy life in our flesh. No one could rightly accuse Him of even one sin. Then this beloved Son of God and Son of Man, offered Himself up before the fierce everlasting wrath of the Father as the holy Substitute for all sinners. On the cross, He received the everlasting punishment for all sin for all of mankind.

Every time you consider the Crucified Christ, which is proclaimed to you through human voice, you see and hear how Jesus loves you. Every time you open your mouth to receive the very body given and the blood shed for the forgiveness of sins you see and taste how Jesus, the Lamb of God, loves you. Every time you confess "I am baptized" with the sign of the cross being made over you, you see and feel the protective garment of Christ's righteousness upon you.

When Jesus first came upon Martha, He comforted her with these words: "Your brother will rise again." She acknowledged this would happen on the day of Jesus' return. Then Jesus told her: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." Did Lazarus die? Yes, of course. But yet he lived. Jesus walked up to his tomb and with a command of awakening, awoke him from his sleep of death. So it will be with all those you mourn who have fallen asleep in the Lord and for you as well. On that last day our Lord who conquered our sin and death will with the command of awakening raise all His believers down through the millennia on that last day, the day of His welcomed return. This is how our Lord of Life keeps us from dying; not from crying in this life, but from dying.

In our day of many remedies, procedures, treatments, life support devices, which seem to prolong life, we are **not** kept from

dying. But faith in the One whom God has sent does keep us from dying. Here is our comfort my fellow redeemed: Our brother in the flesh knows firsthand our human responses to the many crosses laid upon us. Our weeping, lamenting, anxieties and fears in this life are not foreign to our God and Savior.

But as far as we know, Jesus did not reach out His hand to touch the arm of weeping Mary to prolong the weep fest. Not at all, with tears welling up in His own eyes and streaming down His face, He said with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come out!" So shall we all come out of this world of perpetual sadness having been tucked away in our narrow beds of rest and all our tears will be wiped away forevermore. See how Jesus loves you? He keeps you from dying! Live life to its fullest now, you, who will one day fall asleep in Christ, will never die. Amen.