

It is a beautiful thing to see someone come to life again. The movie “Gran Torino” (besides apparently including my look-alike in a small role as a young priest) follows the rebirth of a bitter old man through the love displayed by his neighbors. It is a profound movie that shows the power of friendship to reawaken the best in people. In the movie, Clint Eastwood’s character comes out of his shell of bitterness and isolation because his neighbors, a large Vietnamese family, essentially adopt him as one of their own.

The Gospel today shows us a similar dynamic at play. We see Jesus dealing with the rawest of human emotion, the sadness that comes from being separated by death. Jesus fully enters into the pain of His friends. These weren’t just strangers that Jesus was ministering to, these were close friends. If you have ever had a close friend or family member die, know that Jesus intimately experienced those same tragedies in His own life. He is always able to relate to our pains. Our God came among us so that we would know that He doesn’t stand far off when things are dark. He is the light of the world and comes to bring healing even in the darkness.

The healing that Jesus has for all of us is on full display in the Gospel. Long before He came, this healing was foretold by the prophet Ezekiel, who told of the Lord bringing people out of their graves and putting a new Spirit in people to cause them to live. These two risings are so central for us as Christians. There is the resurrection to new life that we all hope for after we have died. We can have the confident hope that faith provides because Jesus Himself overcame the grave and appeared to many people in a glorious and new way, sending them out with this good news. This resurrection, however, is something we all have to wait to experience.

When Jesus raises Lazarus, His friend, from the grave, He is merely giving us a “preview of coming events,” so to speak. Lazarus would eventually die again, as all of us will in this life on earth. The point of raising Lazarus from

the grave was not primarily about the coming resurrection, but about the resurrection that can and should occur in our hearts.

The resurrection that faith brings within us is the most beautiful and meaningful part of our life here on earth. All of us have those areas inside where we are struggling with the death of sin. So many of the people who knew Lazarus were having a crisis of faith because of the tragedy of their friend. Both Martha and Mary had this struggle. They both greeted Jesus saying, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." How often, when faced with great personal tragedy or the darkness in this world, do we question if Jesus is actually here for us?

With these questions threatening to drag us into despair, Jesus reassures us by saying the same thing to us that He said to Martha. His words are for all of us because He wants to change us from the inside out by His love and friendship. Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" *Do we?* Faced with the death and darkness around us and even *inside* us, do we believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life? We have every reason to believe.

Our faith is one which can and should change our hearts in powerful ways. In "Gran Torino," Clint Eastwood's character is made new through human friendship. This can happen on a profound spiritual level for us when we allow Jesus to speak to us and be with us in our inner dark places. This is His deeper purpose for raising Lazarus. He is giving us a glimpse of the fact that death has to obey His word. He is showing us physically what can happen in our hearts when we allow Him in. He can command us to come out of the tombs of our sin and selfishness into the freedom and newness of His grace working in us. He can free us of all the bindings wrapped around our hearts and make us new inside. He wants to be the life inside us every day.

Let us pray now for that faith which opens us to His life and light working in us. If we are struggling with faith, praying into this struggle is a great way for us to break through. I invite you to join in this prayer with me, saying, "Jesus, I trust in you," those beautiful words of faith spoken to St. Faustina by Jesus.

*Where we struggle with family members who have left the Church or do not have faith...*

*Jesus, I trust in you.*

*Where we have doubts because of those who have died...*

*Jesus, I trust in you.*

*Where we are struggling with any sins which we think are too much for God to forgive...*

*Jesus I trust in you.*

*Where we find it difficult to pray...*

*Jesus I trust in you.*

*Where we are struggling to believe that you are really present in the Eucharist, Confession and all the Sacraments...*

*Jesus, I trust in you.*

*Jesus, we do trust in you. We ask you to awaken faith in our hearts just as you awakened Lazarus from the tomb. Give us that new life through the Holy Spirit that we all need as we journey through these final days of Lent and look forward to Easter. Amen.*