

# **Fifth Week of Lent**

## **March 26 – April 1, 2023**

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From *Carmel, Garden of God* by Fr. Juan DeBono, OCD

Sunday, March 26

## THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS

### From the 5th Sunday of Lent 2008 homily of Pope Benedict XVI

In our Lenten journey we have reached the Fifth Sunday, characterized by the Gospel of the resurrection of Lazarus. It concerns the last “sign” fulfilled by Jesus, after which the chief priests convened the Sanhedrin and deliberated killing him, and decided to kill the same Lazarus who was living proof of the divinity of Christ, the Lord of life and death.

Actually, this Gospel passage shows Jesus as true Man and true God. First of all, the Evangelist insists on his friendship with Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary. He emphasizes that “Jesus loved” them, and this is why he wanted to accomplish the great wonder. *“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him out of sleep,”* he tells his disciples, expressing God’s viewpoint on physical death with the metaphor of sleep. God sees it exactly as sleep, from which he can awaken us. Jesus has shown an absolute power regarding this death, seen when he gives life back to the widow of Nain’s young son and to the 12 year-old girl. Precisely concerning her he said: *“The child is not dead but sleeping,”* attracting the derision of those present. But in truth it is exactly like this: bodily death is a sleep from which God can awaken us at any moment.

This lordship over death does not impede Jesus from feeling sincere *“compassion”* for the sorrow of detachment. Seeing Martha and Mary and those who had come to console them weeping, Jesus was *“deeply loved in spirit and troubled,”* and lastly *“wept.”*

Christ’s heart is divine-human: in him God and man meet perfectly, without separation and without confusion. He is the image, or rather, the incarnation of God who is love, mercy, paternal and maternal tenderness, of God who is Life. Therefore, he solemnly declared to Martha: *“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.”* And he adds, *“Do you believe this?”*

It is a question that Jesus addresses to each one of us: a question that certainly rises above us, rises above our capacity to understand, and it asks us to entrust ourselves to him as he entrusted himself to the Father. Martha’s response is exemplary: *“Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world.”*

Yes, O Lord! We also believe, notwithstanding our doubts and darkness; we believe in you because you have the words of eternal life. We want to believe in you, who give us a trustworthy hope of life beyond life, of authentic and full life in your Kingdom of light and peace.

We entrust this prayer to Mary Most Holy. May her intercession strengthen our faith and hope in Jesus, especially in moments of greater trial and difficulty.

Monday, March 27

## **PAIN AND BEAUTY: THE TWO FACES OF GOD**

From *What the Mystics Know* by Richard Rohr

Faith demands living with a certain degree of anxiety and holding a very real amount of tension. We have to be trained how to do this. The only two things that are strong enough to accomplish this training are suffering and prayer. These two golden paths lead to a different shape of meaning, a different-sized universe, a different set of securities and goals, and always a different Center. Only suffering and prayer are strong enough to decentralize both the ego and the superego. The practice of prayer, we can choose to do ourselves; the suffering is done to us. But we have to be ready to learn from it when it happens and not waste time looking for someone to blame for our unnecessary suffering. That takes some good and strong teaching, too. As I love to say, "It is the things that you cannot do anything about and the things that you cannot do anything with that do something with you."

Would there be communion at all if there were no need on this earth, no suffering on this earth? If there were no sin? No imperfection? I think there would be no such communion as we now have. We would each live in our isolated worlds. I would not need you. I would not be drawn to you. I would be self-sufficient. I would be caught up smugly and happily in my own perfection. I would simply draw my life totally from within and would never need to look at the beauty or pain on others' faces. This is the Gnostic temptation, condemned in some form in every century. There are two things that draw us out of ourselves: pain on other people's faces, and the unbelievable beauty that is other human beings at their best. Or in other words: cross and resurrection.

Pain and beauty constitute the two faces of God. Unbelievable beauty, on the one hand, that we see reflected in the beauty of human beings to which we forever find ourselves attracted – whether it be physical beauty or spiritual beauty. But, on the other hand, mysteriously, brokenness, lameness, and weakness also pull us out of ourselves. We feel them both together in the case of a child. All a helpless child has to do is raise up its hands and most of us go rushing to help.

That factor of vulnerability forces us beyond ourselves. Whenever we see true pain, most of us are drawn out of our own preoccupations and want to take away the pain. I think we are rushing not just toward the hurt child, we are rushing toward God. Toward the suffering God. We want to take the suffering in our arms. That's why Francis could kiss the leper. That's why so many saints wanted to get near suffering – because, as they said again and again, they met Christ there. It "saved" them from their smaller and untrue self.

Many who are working among the suffering or poor say the same. They thought they were going as the benefactors, but they invariably found themselves being helped and liberated. We are saved by those whom we go to save, and both of us are then saved in spite of ourselves. There is a mysterious "third" who is doing the saving. Suffering for and with the other seems to be the only way we know that our lives are not about us.

Tuesday, March 28

## **THE HEALING POWER OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST**

**From *Daily Scriptures and Meditations* by Don Schwager**

Do you know the healing power of the cross of Christ? When the people of Israel were afflicted with serpents in the wilderness because of their sin, God instructed Moses: "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." The bronze serpent points to the cross of Christ which defeats sin and death and obtains everlasting life for those who believe.

The result of Jesus "being lifted up on the cross" and his rising and exaltation to the Father's right hand in heaven is our "new birth in the Spirit" and adoption as sons and daughters of God. God not only redeems us, but he fills us with his own divine life and power that we might share in his glory. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit that we may have power to be his witnesses and to spread and defend the gospel by word and action, and to never be ashamed of Christ's Cross. Are you ready to witness the truth and joy of the gospel to those around you?

While many believed in Jesus and his message, many others, including the religious leaders, opposed him. Some of his listeners openly mocked him when he warned them about their sin of unbelief. It's impossible to be indifferent to Jesus' word and his judgments. We are either for him or against him. There is no middle ground or neutral parties. When Jesus spoke about going away he was speaking about his return to his Father and to his glory. His opponents could not follow him because by their continuous disobedience to the word of God and their refusal to accept him, they had shut themselves off from God. Jesus warned them that if they continued to refuse him they would *die in their sins*. Jesus' words echoed the prophetic warning given to Ezekiel where God warns his people to heed his word before the time is too late. God gives us time to turn to him and to receive his grace, but that time is right now.

To sin literally means *to miss the mark* or *to be off target*. The essence of sin is that it diverts us from God and from our true purpose in life -- to know the source of all truth and beauty which is God himself and to be united with God in everlasting joy. When Adam first sinned, he hid himself from God. That is what sin does; it separates us from the One who is all loving, all-wise, and all-just. Jesus went on to explain that if people could not recognize him in his word then they would recognize him in the Cross -- when the Son of man is lifted up. The cross is the ultimate proof of God's love for us. *God so loved the world that he gave us his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

To fail to recognize Jesus and where he came from is to remain in spiritual darkness; to believe Jesus and his words is to walk in the joy and light of God's truth. There are certain opportunities in life that come and do not return. Each of us is given the opportunity to know and to accept Jesus Christ, as Lord and Savior. But that opportunity can be rejected and lost. Life here is limited and short, but how we live it has everlasting consequences. Do you take advantage of the present time to make room for God so that your life will count for eternity?

Wednesday, March 29

## **THE ROYAL ROAD OF THE HOLY CROSS**

**From *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis**

To many, the saying, "Deny thyself, take up thy cross and follow Me," seems hard, but it will be much harder to hear that final word: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." Those who hear the word of the cross and follow it willingly now, need not fear that they will hear of eternal damnation on the day of judgment. This sign of the cross will be in the heavens when the Lord comes to judge. Then all the servants of the cross, who during life made themselves one with the Crucified, will draw near with great trust to Christ, the judge.

Why, then, do you fear to take up the cross when through it you can win a kingdom? In the cross is salvation, in the cross is life, in the cross is protection from enemies, in the cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness, in the cross is strength of mind, in the cross is joy of spirit, in the cross is highest virtue, in the cross is perfect holiness. There is no salvation of soul nor hope of everlasting life but in the cross.

Take up your cross, therefore, and follow Jesus, and you shall enter eternal life. He Himself opened the way before you in carrying His cross, and upon it He died for you, that you, too, might take up your cross and long to die upon it. If you die with Him, you shall also live with Him, and if you share His suffering, you shall also share His glory.

Behold, in the cross is everything, and upon your dying on the cross everything depends. There is no other way to life and to true inward peace than the way of the holy cross and daily mortification. Go where you will, seek what you will, you will not find a higher way, nor a less exalted but safer way, than the way of the holy cross. Arrange and order everything to suit your will and judgment, and still you will find that some suffering must always be borne, willingly or unwillingly, and thus you will always find the cross.

Either you will experience bodily pain or you will undergo tribulation of spirit in your soul. At times you will be forsaken by God, at times troubled by those about you and, what is worse, you will often grow weary of yourself. You cannot escape, you cannot be relieved by any remedy or comfort but must bear with it as long as God wills. For He wishes you to learn to bear trial without consolation, to submit yourself wholly to Him that you may become more humble through suffering. No one understands the passion of Christ so thoroughly or heartily as the man whose lot it is to suffer the like himself.

The cross, therefore, is always ready; it awaits you everywhere. No matter where you may go, you cannot escape it, for wherever you go you take yourself with you and shall always find yourself. Turn where you will -- above, below, without, or within -- you will find a cross in everything, and everywhere you must have patience if you would have peace within and merit an eternal crown.

If you carry the cross willingly, it will carry and lead you to the desired goal where indeed there shall be no more suffering, but here there shall be. If you carry it unwillingly, you create a burden for yourself and increase the load, though still you have to bear it. If you cast away one cross, you will find another and perhaps a heavier one. Do you expect to escape what no mortal man can ever avoid? Which of the saints was without a cross or trial on this earth? Not even Jesus Christ, our Lord, Whose every hour on earth knew the pain of His passion.

*Thursday, March 30*

## **DETACHMENT**

### **From *Approach to Calvary* by Dom Hubert Van Zeller**

There is one detachment which we bring about, and there is another which God brings about for us. The Christians who is trying to follow Christ on the way to Calvary does not confine his detachment to what he gives up; he thinks of detachment more from the point of view of what God takes. A religious man can become so deeply interested in the process of detaching himself from this and that – in drawing up his list of things to be shed – that he forgets what detachment is primarily for. So long as I say, “Lord, look with favor upon these renunciations which I am making for you,” I have one eye on the generosity of my sacrifice. When I say, “Lord, I tend to cling so tenaciously to the things which I like that the best plan would be for you to detach me in your own way by taking whatever you want,” I have my eyes on God. It is fairly general rule that wherever there is less glamour in allowing God to take than in making self-chosen sacrifices.

But it is a doctrine which has to be properly understood. A man has no right to conclude that because he has nominally given to God a free hand, he can dispense himself from ever making a sacrifice. Far from providing a good excuse for indulgence, the principle of letting God take supposes is an over-all declaration against indulgence. On the assumption that a measure of renunciation is recognized by the soul as absolutely necessary, it is suggested here that the grace of detachment comes more readily when the emphasis is on God’s action than on one’s own. Detachment is a grace but not necessarily a miracle. There has to be the will to detachment, and even the actual striving after detachment, before God grants the supernatural habit of detachment. We are inclined to make the mistake, when thinking about the relation between the gift and the use of the gift, of imagining that the reward comes first and that the virtue comes after – as one who would say, “I can wait for the grace of continence before I need try to be continent.” While we have every reason to trust in grace rather than in any strength of our own, we have no reason to trust in grace as though it were magic.

Leaving aside the man whose laziness is supported by superstition, who persuades himself that one day there will be a click in his mind and he will thenceforth be able to float along his way to God unencumbered by creatures, we can consider the alternative methods employed by two men who are seriously bent upon perfection. Both men hear Christ’s summons to launch out into the deep. Both survey their respective crafts, and to each it must appear that his boat is overloaded for the task. One man says: “If I am heading for deep waters, I must take no risks. I shall have to throw overboard my cigarettes, my sherry, my spare clothes, my books, my pictures, my camera and my television-set. It is the price one has to pay, and after all one is doing it for God.” The other man says: “I hate getting rid of anything. When it comes to choosing, I do not know what I am meant to keep and what I am meant to throw away. If I am heading for deep waters, I must take no risks. I dare not throw away something which may be necessary to me when the voyage gets under way. I dare not risk having to come back to pick up what I had stupidly judged to be ballast. I must put my confidence in God, and let him arrange the journey for me. It is he who has called me to do this thing, so I can believe that he will either wash overboard what is excessive weight or else give me the judgment to make these practical decisions as I go along.” Where the first man is liable to alternate moods of dismay and vainglory, the second is made constantly aware of God’s providence and of his own insufficiency. Where are the first, devising an approach which may or may not be in the plan of God, limits the idea of renunciation to a particular area, the second gives unconditional scope to the divine action. The one looks at his boat more than at God, the other looks at God more than at his boat.

*Friday, March 31*

## **COMPASSION TRANSFORMS DESPAIR INTO HOPE**

**From *Show Me the Way* by Henri Nouwen**

When Jesus saw the crowd harassed and dejected like sheep without a shepherd, he felt with them in the center of his being. When he saw the blind, the paralyzed, and the deaf being brought to him from all directions, he trembled from within and experienced their pain in his own heart. When he noticed that the thousands who had followed him for days were tired and hungry, he said, I am moved with compassion. And so it was with the two blind men who called after him, the leper who fell to his knees in front of him, and the widow of Nain who was burying her only son. They moved him, they made him feel with all his intimate sensibilities the depth of their sorrow. He became lost with the lost, hungry with the hungry, and sick with the sick. In him, all suffering was sensed with a perfect sensitivity. The great mystery revealed to us in this is that Jesus, who is the sinless son of God, chose in total freedom to suffer fully our pains and thus to let us discover the true nature of our passions. In him, we see and experience the persons we truly are. He who is divine lives our broken humanity not as a curse, but as a blessing. His divine compassion makes it possible for us to face our sinful selves, because it transforms our broken human condition from a cause of despair into a source of hope.

Everything that Jesus has done, said, and undergone is meant to show us that the love we most long for is given to us by God, not because we've deserved it, but because God is a God of love.

Jesus has come among us to make that divine love visible and to offer it to us. In his conversation with Nicodemus he says: "...this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son ... God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but so that through him the world might be saved." In these words the meaning of his Incarnation is summed up. God has become human – that is, God-with-us – in order to show us that the anxious concern for recognition and the violence among us might spring from a lack of faith in the love of God. If we had a firm faith in God's unconditional love for us, it would no longer be necessary to be always on the lookout for ways of being admired by people, and we would need, even less, to obtain from people by force what God desires to give us so abundantly.

*Saturday, April 1*

## **SUFFERING**

**From *Carmel, Garden of God* by Fr. Juan DeBono, OCD**

Physical and moral suffering is part of our daily life. Even though we are aware that God did not create suffering, and even though we do believe that suffering is a direct consequence of sin, we may think, or else the devil may make us believe, that suffering is a punishment from God for the sin of mankind. The fact is that God can only create good things, and he can never use His power to merely punish us. Suffering therefore entered the world only as a direct consequence of sin. We can easily understand this with the help of an example. Imagine a young man who takes the decision to go and rent a house for himself; it is true that by doing so, he might be more free than when he was living at his parent's, but after a month living alone, he starts to understand the implications of his decision. He has to start paying his electricity, water and telephone bills; he has to do his own shopping and prepare his own meals; he has to do the cleaning; and many other day to day errands. When this young man was still living at his parental home, he never had to deal with all these worries. On the other hand, we can never say that such worries were passed on to him by his parents, whose only wish was to have him back home. By choosing to live an independent life, this young man had to suffer some consequences.

The same with sin: we can never say that suffering was bestowed by God as a punishment for the sin of mankind. Suffering entered our system only because we freely accepted to go and live an independent life from our God.

The same with a computer virus: suffering entered our system only because we opened the junk-mail sent to us by the devil. God had more than once invited us to pay attention, and delete any e-mail coming from the devil. God knew that the devil -envious of our joy- was trying to send us this infected mail. Ignoring God's advice and being deceived by the devil, our forefathers opened the devil's attachment, and our system was definitely infected by suffering. Even though through Jesus' intervention in history, and through the Sacraments today, we may heal our computer memory, some pop-up still do come up, and those who continue to mingle with the devil, still have an infinity of viruses that can possibly infect and crush their p.c.

Choosing suffering as His preferential path, Jesus showed us first of all, that suffering is not God's punishment. Jesus, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, did not just suffer like anyone else, but by accepting suffering, Jesus showed us that it is through this means that we can free ourselves from sin and pass on to a new life in Him.

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity suffered greatly throughout the span of her short life. In a first moment she was eager to accept suffering, thinking that this will 'console' Christ's heart. Later on – especially after understanding “that sacrifice is only love put into action” – she started to wish once again to suffer, but this time only because she wished to repay God with her love, doing always His will, walking side by side by her Christ. She writes: “I cannot say I love suffering in itself, but I love it because it conforms me to Him who is my Bridegroom and my Love. Oh, you see, that bestows such sweet peace, such profound joy on the soul, and you end up putting your happiness in everything that is irritating. Little Mama, try to put joy – not the joy you can feel but the joy of your will – into every irritation, every sacrifice, and say to the Master: ‘I am not worthy to suffer that for you, I do not deserve that conformity with you.’ You’ll see” she continues, “that my recipe is excellent, it puts a delightful peace in the depths of the heart and draws you closer to God.”