

In the last three Sundays, the gospels have painted three very portraits of personal encounters with the living God.

- **Jesus and the woman at the well – love at first sight**
- **Jesus and the man born blind – Jesus cares for the stranger – the slow unfolding first the giving of physical sight and then seeing Jesus with the eyes of faith**
- **Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead- It was a deepening of the long-term friendship of Jesus with Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary.**

Let us take time to focus on this third portrait, one which may parallel ours since many of us have had a long-term relationship with the Lord.

Jesus knew the family of Lazarus, Martha and Mary well. They were VERY good friends

- **Jesus had stopped in their home many times (Jews were expected to travel to Jerusalem for three special is for the guest to be met by the man of the house:**
 - **It was the custom for the male guests to be greeted by the man of the house; women were always in the background; men ate together; women and children ate separately;**

However, we read in scripture that on one occasion Jesus was met by Mary and Martha at the front door.

- In fact, Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to him, much as one of his male disciples would do.
- In John's gospel Mary was the woman who bathed Jesus' feet with ointment and wiped them with her hair, a very intimate sign of closeness.

So when their brother, Lazarus fell deathly ill, it was no surprise that the sisters send word for Jesus.

- Lazarus' death was a BIG loss for the two women.
- Jesus was a big disappointment to Martha and Mary.
- "If you had been here my brother would not have died."

It is hard to measure the pain of losing a loved one.

Diane Sawyer at the funeral of Nancy Regan's funeral the other day, Diane Sawyer mentioned Nancy's comment at the death of her own husband. She said "The size of her loss is equal to the size of her love."

Yes, it is hard to measure the pain of losing a loved one.

- A distraught young widow once said, “someone should have told me that all marriages must end either in divorce or in death.”

Yes, it is hard to measure the pain of losing a loved one.

- Juan Windam: confronting the death of four close relatives in a few year period. Mother, sister, nephew, and brother.

Yes, it is hard to measure the pain of losing a loved one.

- Young people facing the violent death of their peers; Story of the funeral of the Henry Ford High School Student: celebrating death: pictures of the deceased on t shirts.

If you had been here my brother would never have died. If you had been here my husband would never had died, if you had been here my child would never have died.

Jesus breaks down over the loss of his friend, Lazarus, and the grief of Martha and Mary.

He confronts death directly.

Then he invites Martha and Mary to believe in him.

Finally, he overcomes death itself. He acts.

How does Jesus deal with death?

Confronting it directly as the Son of God.

“Did I not tell you that if you believe you would see the glory of God?

.... See the glory of God....see the glory of God...where have I heard those words before?

They echo in my ears from the beginning of the story of the blind man. When his disciples asked whether it was the blind man’s sins or his parents that caused the blindness, he replied, “It was neither the sin of this man or of his father, but that the glory of God might be revealed;”

Martha and Mary are challenged to face death directly and believe in Jesus’ power to overcome death which will reveal the Glory of God!

(Pause)

At Nancy Regan’s funeral service, a woman read a beautiful passage from scripture. At the end of the reading on the resurrection, she said these words, “As Nancy believed: the Word of the Lord. She knew that Nancy Regan believed that Jesus would raise her from the dead.

At the end of the reading: “As Nancy believed: The word of the Lord.”, but the reader was not sure herself. That’s why she said the words, As Nancy said, the Word of the Lord.

Is today’s reading, we are forced to once again face death.

We who are close friends of Jesus, his adopted brothers and sisters.

He has pitched his tent among us.

He said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this?”

Mary said. “Yes, Lord, I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God, the one who is coming into this world.”

My brothers and sisters Christ invites us to answer the same question.

Then, after freeing the spirits of the sisters, Jesus says, “unbind him and let him go free.”

He says to us who hold on to those who died; unbind them and let them go free! For I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in me, even if they die, will live, and whoever lives and believe in me will never die?

Do you believe this?

Yes Lord, I am coming to believe that you are the Christ, the son of the living God.

I do believe, Lord; but help my unbelief.

