

DAY 5

II - NOT SURE, YET ASSURED

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Sometimes we are not quite sure of what God's desire for us might be, so right now we want to continue *listening to him, my beloved Son*, in order to hear that desire. But we may seem not to hear anything, we may seem to be facing God's silence, as if God did not care. Is Jesus' offer of friendship, his call to closeness, an empty gesture? We are **not sure** and yet we feel **assured** of Christ's love in the midst of this lack of clarity. How can this be? It will be helpful to *listen* to an instructive episode in the life of Jesus, to listen to his *deeds*.

You are probably quite familiar with the passage of Martha and Mary and their ill brother and the eventual resurrection of Lazarus, the text of which you can find at the end of this section. But we are reading it in hindsight, which is 20/20. For us the episode lacks most of its deep emotion, because we have "peeked" and know the outcome. But Martha and Mary did not know the outcome. They were deeply anguished before their brother's death and deeply hurt after not having heard from Jesus. Both feelings must have been very intense.

We are told that *Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus* and yet, after receiving their anguished message, he stays put. No reason for this is given in the narrative other than the cryptic statement: *this illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God*, which of course the disciples did not understand. Mary and Martha are really hurt by not hearing from Jesus and then Lazarus dies and Martha and Mary feel betrayed. Both say separately to Jesus: *Why were you not here? If you had been here, this would not have happened*. Even some of the bystanders criticize him: *Could not this one, who... have done something?* We often hear such complaints in the face of tragedy, be it individual, social, national or global: *where is God?* As hospital chaplain, I heard it almost every time I accompanied the family of a loved one "dead on arrival", a very painful death they had not anticipated.

Yet Martha rushes to Jesus, even before he enters the village. She is **not sure** about the events, but she is **assured** about Jesus: *even now, I know...* Jesus had cured a number of sick people, yet here is a case where Jesus chose not to heal. This resulted in Mary's and Martha's hurt and they of course could not understand –who can **understand** pain? Clearly, *our ways are not God's ways* [Is. 55: 8].

We now know the outcome, which definitely reinforced their **assurance** about Jesus. Being sure and being assured are not the same thing. Being sure speaks of understanding, which rests on evidence, while being assured speaks of an inner stance and this rests on trust. Martha was **assured**, even when she could not be **sure**.

But not all reactions to the raising of Lazarus were constructive. The reactions of the religious leaders –*one man must die, not the whole people*– reflects a biased *listening to him*, to his deeds, and this ushers us into the events of Holy Week. The one **deed** of Holy Week was too loud for the disciples to *listen to him* all at once and it remains too loud even for us. We will need time to *listen* prayerfully to the various components of the **one deed** of passion-death-resurrection.

REFERENCE SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

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Jn. 11: 1-44

Now a man was ill, Lazarus from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who had anointed the Lord with perfumed oil and dried his feet with her hair; it was her brother Lazarus who was ill. So the sisters sent word to him, saying: *Master, the one you love is ill.* When Jesus heard this, he said: *This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.* Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place where he was. Then after this he said to his disciples: *Let us go back to Judea.* The disciples said to him: *Rabbi, the Jews were just trying to stone you, and you want to go back there?* Jesus answered: *Are there not twelve hours in a day? If one walks during the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks at night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.* He said this, and then told them: *Our friend Lazarus is asleep, but I am going to awaken him.* So the disciples said to him: *Master, if he is asleep, he will be saved.* But Jesus was talking about his death, while they thought that he meant ordinary sleep. So then Jesus said to them clearly: *Lazarus has died. And I am glad for you that I was not there, that you may believe. Let us go to him.* So Thomas, called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples: *Let us also go to die with him.*

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, only about two miles away. And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. Martha said to Jesus: *Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. [But] even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.* Jesus said to her: *Your brother will rise.* Martha said to him: *I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day.* Jesus told her: *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?* She said to him: *Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.*

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary secretly, saying: *The teacher is here and is asking for you.* As soon as she heard this, she rose quickly and went to him. For Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still where Martha had met him. So, when the Jews who were with her in the house comforting her saw Mary get up quickly and go out, they followed her, presuming that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell 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 had come with her weeping, he became perturbed and deeply troubled, and said: *Where have you laid him?* They said to him: *Sir, come and see.* And Jesus wept. So the Jews said: *See how he loved him.* But some of them said: *Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?*

So Jesus, perturbed again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay across it. Jesus said: *Take away the stone.* Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him: *Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days.* Jesus said to her: *Did I not tell you that, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?* So they took away the stone. And Jesus raised his eyes and said: *Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me.* And when he had said this, he cried out in a loud voice: *Lazarus, come out!* The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them: *Untie him and let him go.*