

My dearest brothers and sisters in Christ, this weekend—the weekend, of course, before Holy Pascha—is a transition time. We’ve come from the very, very solemn nature of the Great Fast. We are about to enter, starting tomorrow evening, the very, very solemn nature of Holy Week. And in between, on this weekend, we celebrate. We have joy. We have amazing reasons to be joyful.

Of course, we do not abandon the solemn nature of the season. We still fast, although tomorrow we will have a small dispensation on Sunday. But the fact of the matter is that the solemn nature of the Fast remains. And yet, in the midst of it, there is a celebration. Today, we celebrate the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead.

Actually, this was not the final resurrection. We understand the final resurrection will be when our Lord comes for the second time and calls all of the dead from the tombs and reunites their soul and body. The big difference here is that Lazarus eventually died—of natural causes. Whereas in the general resurrection, we will live forever to eternity. But nonetheless, Jesus did perform this amazing miracle to raise his friend Lazarus from the dead.

Let’s look at a few points of the Gospel, because I really want to emphasize why this celebration today is very personal. Very personal. The things that we need to take from it, the things that we learn from it, and why it affects us in our daily lives—especially in our current environment when the world is upside down. So let’s take a look at what this means.

The Lord first hesitates to come, and He hesitates on purpose. His disciples tell Him that His friend Lazarus, the one He loved, is ill. And Jesus says to them, “This illness is not unto death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of him.” Notice: the Lord is already telling them that when Lazarus dies, it will be for the glory of God—through Lazarus.

Later, the disciples say to the Lord, after Lazarus had died, “Are you going to go now? The Jews were seeking to stone you. Are you going to go there again?” And Jesus says to them, “We need to work while the light of the world is present. Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to wake him out of sleep.”

The disciples misunderstand Him and say, “If he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” But Jesus was speaking of his death. And then He says plainly, “Lazarus is dead.” And then something amazing: “For your sake, I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.” What an amazing statement! For your sake—for the disciples’ sake—I’m glad I wasn’t there, so that you may believe.

Jesus came and knew that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. Why is four days significant? Because the ancient Hebrew tradition believed that the soul of a dead person lingers for three days. So it would have been plausible, had Jesus come sooner, for the Pharisees to claim that Lazarus wasn’t really dead—that he was simply in a coma and recovered naturally.

But after four days—especially in the heat of Jerusalem—it would have been obvious that the body was decomposing. The hymnology of this feast mentions the stench and corruption of the body, which highlights the miraculous nature of what Jesus did. Some prophets raised the dead, but none raised someone four days in the tomb, already decaying.

Jesus comes to Bethany, to the home of Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha. Martha goes out to meet Him, while Mary stays in the house. Martha says, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” But that’s not true. It was God’s will that Lazarus die. If it had been God’s will to prevent that, then Jesus would have. But it wasn’t. And Martha misunderstands.

Yet she adds, “Even now, I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” Jesus tells her, “Your brother will rise again.” She replies, “I know he will rise in the resurrection at the last day.” The Jews believed in the final resurrection.

Then Jesus makes perhaps the most stunning statement in the entire Gospel: “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. Do you believe this?”

Notice: He says I am the resurrection and the life—not I will be. And this is important for us. We are not waiting for some future event to receive new life. He is the resurrection, and in Him, we can be resurrected to new life today.

Then Martha calls Mary, and Mary says the same: “If You had been here, my brother would not have died.” Jesus sees the people weeping and is deeply moved in spirit. And Jesus wept. This shows us His humanity. God does not weep. God has no emotions. But in His humanity, Jesus wept for His friend. And in His divinity, He was about to raise him from the dead.

Jesus comes to the tomb. Martha, still clinging to the physical reality, says, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor. He has been dead four days.” She still didn’t fully understand what Jesus meant when He said, “I am the resurrection.”

But they roll away the stone. Jesus prays, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the sake of the people standing by, that they may believe you sent me.” And He cries out, “Lazarus, come out!” And the dead man comes out—bound in grave clothes. Jesus says, “Unbind him and let him go.” Many of the Jews believed in Him because of this miracle.

This miracle was the precursor to Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. The people celebrated Him because of what He had done—they came to see the man who raised someone from the dead after four days.

So, my dears, this Gospel is for us. This event is for us. Lazarus was one of us. And the hymn for Lazarus Saturday says, “Having confirmed the universal resurrection, Thou hast raised Lazarus from the dead.” The Church teaches us that Lazarus’ resurrection confirms what awaits all who die in Christ.

But, as I said earlier, we don’t have to wait. The Lord is the resurrection. He raised Lazarus to show us what is in store for us. And to show us that His will is always good and true. Martha and Mary eventually came to understand that. And we must, too.

Every time we wake up in the morning, He gives us an opportunity to be raised to new life—to leave behind not only yesterday, but our entire past. To have no fear for the future. Every day is a resurrection day in Christ.

There’s enough in this world that is already dead. And most of the world does not have Jesus Christ. But we do. And that means that our lives and our journey to the Kingdom of Heaven is alive. It is a joyous, though difficult, journey.

We must never forget the role that our Lord plays in our life. If we don’t have Him, we have nothing. Yes, we have each other—but even our relationships with one another are manifestations of His love for us. Christ must be the center. If He is not, we will be in despair. We’ll be lost. But if He is, we will have peace, regardless of what happens around us.

So on this joyous day, when we celebrate the resurrection of Lazarus, let us not forget that He is guiding us—every day—toward the empty tomb. And our priority is to gain our place in heaven. It is not to become rich. Not to be popular. Not to be comfortable. But to be with Christ in His Kingdom.

And that journey begins now. We pray that the Lord will continue to bless us, guiding us along the remainder of our journey toward the empty tomb. In His name, for He is blessed always.

Christ is in our midst.