

A reflection on the fifth week of Lent

In this fifth week of Lent, let's reflect on a beautiful prayer composed by John Henry Cardinal Newman:

May the Lord support us
all the day long
till the shadows lengthen
and the evening comes,
and the busy world is hushed,
and the fever of life is over,
and our work is done!
Then in his mercy
may he give us a safe lodging,
and a holy rest,
and peace at the last!

Lent is a time for us to think seriously about who Jesus is and to renew our faith. We go deep inside, into the very depth of our souls, in order to begin our spiritual life all over again. In Newman's prayer, Jesus supports us as we go about our busy, hectic lives. He is there when we are working and so busy that we are not even aware he is with us. Then, in the quiet of the end of day, we know Jesus has been with us every minute. Then, at the end of life, we know that he awaits us with shelter, rest and the peace that passes understanding.

The narrative of the raising of Lazarus helps us to comprehend the conflicts Jesus faced as he moved toward his final days. Arriving in Bethany, he wept when he was told that his beloved friend, Lazarus, had died. He knew that Martha and Mary believed he had failed them by arriving after their brother had died. The sisters rebuked him, but they still had faith in his power.

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Over the objections that it was too late to try to save Lazarus, Jesus commanded that the stone be rolled away from the tomb, and he shouted for Lazarus to come out. For most of the mourners, at the sight of Lazarus, their unbelief turned to belief, their grief turned to joy. In one moment death was conquered, and they knew God was with them. Others, for political motives, saw this as an opportunity to have Jesus killed.

In the week before Passover, Jesus was in Bethany again. Lazarus was there, alive. Mary in her gratitude anointed Jesus's feet and dried them with her hair. While some believed more strongly, others, including Judas Iscariot, began to plot against him.

Jesus's life was like ours in many ways, full of anxiety and responsibility. He was under pressure from many directions. Some wanted to elevate his status, others wanted to destroy him. He called on God to help him, and we do also. In Lent, and especially in Holy Week, we are reminded of the price he paid when he took on human form. We might ask, why must this happen? Are we ready to follow him through the suffering and the glory of the next few days?

Here is his promise and our reason for claiming him as our own: *"I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live."*

The music, by Margaret Rizza and Kevin Duncan, is from the album "Her Music for Piano," Kevin Mayhew Publishers.

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