

Lazarus Saturday: St. Lazarus the Resurrected

By Very Rev. Fr. Lawrence Farley

Lazarus was a close friend of Jesus, and he lived in Bethany with his sisters, Mary and Martha. When he grew sick, word was sent to Jesus to leave the safety of Galilee and come south to Judea to heal His friend. When Christ received word of this sickness, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God," and He remained two days longer in the place where He was. Then He decided to make the two-day trip south to visit Lazarus, much to His disciples' alarm; they feared for His life if He should venture into Judea again. Christ was adamant, and, reluctantly, His disciples went with Him.

When Christ returned to Lazarus's home, His friend had been dead and buried for four days. Christ remained outside the town and sent word to Mary and Martha that He had returned. The sisters each went to see Him, grieving that He had not returned in time to save their brother from death. Christ assured them that if they would believe in Him, they would see the glory of God, as Lazarus would rise again.

Coming to Lazarus's tomb, Jesus wept, not only over Lazarus, but over the desolation and death that held the entire human race captive. Praying aloud so that all present would know that He worked His miracles by the power of God, Christ stood before Lazarus's grave and cried aloud, "Lazarus, come forth!" Lazarus sprang back to life, healed and fresh, and stumbled forth from the tomb, still bound hand and foot with the grave wrappings. Jesus commanded that the people unbind him and set him free.

Many believed in Jesus because of this, with the result that Jesus' enemies plotted to kill Lazarus too. Lazarus lived for years after this, dying, it is said, in Kition in Cyprus. It is possible that he moved to Cyprus to escape local persecution. His relics were later returned to Constantinople by the Emperor Leo the Wise (d. 912). Lazarus is honored on this Sunday as a foretaste of the Resurrection.

Palm Sunday

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When it was apparent that Lazarus was sick unto death, the Lord Jesus discerned that this mortal sickness, occurring so close to the Passover, was to serve the glory of God. He realized that it was the Father's will that He raise Lazarus from the dead as an astounding testimony to His power and as a way of calling the attention of Jerusalem to His messianic authority.

Thus, after the raising of Lazarus, all Jerusalem was stirred and overwhelmed with the report of Jesus' miracle, and when He rode into Jerusalem six days before His Passion, the entire city was jubilant at the thought that their Messiah was coming to them, bringing the Kingdom of God. Our Lord entered the Holy City in humility, riding a donkey, not a warhorse, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah. He thus proclaimed that His Kingdom was not a military one but a spiritual one, and that He had come not to destroy Israel's national enemies but death itself, the enemy of all mankind.

Even the children rejoiced in Jesus' messianic Kingdom, shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" as all the people threw their garments into the road and cut palm branches to strew His path with honor as He entered the Holy City. Thus, the ancient prophecies were fulfilled as the Messiah entered Jerusalem in humility and in triumph, bringing the eternal Kingdom of God.