

## **March 29th, 2020: Fifth Sunday of Lent**

First Reading: Ezekiel 37.12-14

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 130.1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7b-8. (R. 7b)

Second Reading: Romans 8.8-11

Gospel (longer version): John 11.1-45

Homily by Fr. Robert Weaver

“Come and see.” Any man in our diocese considering the priesthood may very well find himself going on a “Come and See” weekend at St. Peter’s Seminary, located in nearby London, ON. This scheduled event provides an opportunity to spend a couple of days at the seminary to pray, attend Mass, visit with priests and seminarians, and get an overall “feel” of what it would be like to attend the seminary. I went to a “Come and See” weekend quite a few years ago and I found it helped me to better understand how God was calling me.

And “Come and See” events are not just for Catholic men considering the priesthood. For instance, the Sisters Adorers of the Precious Blood, a contemplative community of women also from London, ON, invite interested women to “Come and see” their monastery and spend time praying with them and learning about their Christ-centered vocations (see: <http://www.pbsisters.on.ca/vocations/come-and-see/>).

Not surprisingly, the expression or invitation to “Come and see” is found in the Scriptures. For example, chapter 1 of John’s Gospel account describes how John the Baptist was standing with two of his disciples one day when he saw Jesus walk by and he said “Behold, the Lamb of God!” Not surprisingly, John’s two disciples decided to follow Jesus. Then Jesus turned and asked them what they were looking for. They told Jesus they wanted to know where he was staying. To that Jesus said, “Come and see.” Well, they stayed with Jesus and began to learn more about the Savior of the world (35-41).

We also read the words “Come and see” in the fourth chapter of John in which Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at the well (this was the Gospel reading only two Sundays ago – the third Sunday of Lent). This time, however, Jesus does not say these words to someone else but someone else says them *about him*.

In this meeting, after Jesus asked the woman for a drink of water and they conversed for a while, Jesus told her to call her husband. To this the woman said that she had no husband. Jesus then tells her that she is correct in saying that she has no husband, for she actually has had five husbands and the man she is with now is not her husband.

Consequently, the woman was likely very astonished, and she said to Jesus, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet” (vv. 7-19).

Jesus and the woman continued talking a little longer and then Jesus’s disciples came along and the woman returned to the city. She has a message, however, as she invites the people in the city to “**Come and see** (bold added) a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” Her words captivated the people and they went to see Jesus and they discovered that he is truly the Savior of the world (vv. 20-42).

Clearly, this invitation to “Come and see” can result in people having profound encounters with Our Lord Jesus Christ. And this expression comes up again in this Sunday’s Gospel reading, taken from John 11:1-45.

In this passage, we read about the death of Jesus’s close friend Lazarus and how Jesus brought him back to life. The setting for this event is in the small village of Bethany, located about two miles east of Jerusalem (see Ignatius Catholic Study Bible, p. 183).

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had already been lying dead in a tomb for four days, and there were many people around who were consoling Lazarus’s sisters Martha and Mary. Martha went out to meet

Jesus and told him that if he had arrived earlier, her brother would not be dead. Jesus tells her that her brother will rise again, and then he unveils to her his divine nature and mission with these words: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (vv. 5, 17-25).

Shortly thereafter, Mary met Jesus and repeated what Martha had said; if Jesus had arrived earlier, then her brother would not be dead. Mary was weeping at this time, as were the Jewish people with her, and Jesus was greatly disturbed by this. Jesus then asks where they had buried Lazarus. They answered: “Lord, **come and see**” (bold added) (vv. 29-34).

“Come and see.” Once again, this brief yet tremendously significant expression appears in John’s Gospel account. This time it is not Jesus saying these words, or someone else saying them in regards to Jesus, but these words are being said to Jesus himself. And how does Jesus respond? John says that “Jesus began to weep” (v. 35).

Wow! Think of this! Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, the Word made flesh and the One through whom all things were created, began to weep (Jn 1:3,14; 4:42). This prompts us to ask: How come?

Present-day Scripture scholar Brant Pitre proposes that, like Martha and Mary, Jesus, in His humanity, grieved over the death of Lazarus. Furthermore, many centuries ago, St. Augustine stated that Jesus wept in order to teach us to weep. Pitre elaborates on Augustine’s insight by stating that “Christ [did]... not diminish the reality and the horror of suffering....He fully participates in [suffering]...and he shows us that to weep and to mourn over the suffering and death of the world is natural and it’s a good thing. He himself does it....And he feels the pain of that loss in his own human heart” (Pitre, MRE, pp. 8-9).

So, yes, it is likely that in his human nature Jesus wept because he was mourning the loss of his friend Lazarus. Moreover, it could be the case that Jesus also wept because so many around him were weeping. He felt badly that they were grieving and perhaps they were spiritually discouraged as well. In other words, Jesus empathized with Martha, Mary, and the others to the point that it contributed to his own weeping.

Empathy is defined as “the ability to share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation” (see: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/empathy>). As Catholic-Christians, we consider empathy to be a positive thing for it helps us to draw closer to other people and serve them more wholeheartedly.

There is a point, however, in which too much empathy can be harmful and we become mentally and emotionally preoccupied with the suffering of others. This can lead to what is known as *compassion fatigue* which “is a type of...trauma that happens when a person is overwhelmed by the trauma and struggles of other people”

(see: <https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/running-low-on-empathy-how-to-heal-from-compassion-fatigue-1115197>).

Signs of compassion fatigue include feeling extremely troubled by the suffering of others, feeling hopeless or powerless, having difficulty concentrating, feeling very tired, and emotionally isolating one's self from others. (see: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/high-octane-women/201407/are-you-suffering-compassion-fatigue>).

Anyone who spends quite a bit of time helping others or thinking about other's suffering may develop compassion fatigue. This includes people working in fields such as health care and counseling, as well as caregivers for ill people. Moreover, being exposed to the suffering of thousands, or even millions, of others through our TVs, laptops, and smartphones can also bring about compassion fatigue

(see: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/high-octane-women/201407/are-you-suffering-compassion-fatigue> AND: <https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/running-low-on-empathy-how-to-heal-from-compassion-fatigue-1115197>).

As with any difficulty we face it is crucial that we turn to help from the Risen Lord Jesus. With that, let us revisit today's Gospel reading. After mentioning that Jesus wept, John describes how Jesus went to Lazarus' tomb and directed others to remove the stone. They did this and then Jesus thanked his heavenly Father out loud so that others would know that he was sent by him. After that, Jesus cried "Lazarus, come out!" And indeed, the dead man came to life and came out of the tomb (vv. 36-44).

What an awesome manifestation of Jesus's divinity! As mentioned, in his humanity Jesus wept over the death of Lazarus but from there he did not fall into any sort of compassion fatigue or spiritual discouragement but instead raised a dead man to life! He did not do this for his own benefit but to show others that he is the way to eternal salvation, that he is "the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25) (see Ignatius Catholic Study Bible, p. 183).

Jesus's miraculous raising of Lazarus gives us much hope. Many of us have challenging responsibilities serving others in our personal and work lives and we are hearing lots about the ongoing suffering of others around the world.

In our empathy and genuine concern for others we are "at-risk" for discouragement and compassion fatigue if we rely only on our efforts and/or the efforts of others. Instead, we must trust in the unlimited power and healing mercy of the Risen Lord Jesus.

Jesus does not necessarily heal others, or ourselves, when and how we want him to (as Mary and Martha found out in today's Gospel reading) but we must trust that "all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28). Let us never tire of turning to Our Lord in prayer, knowing that he is always there for us and that he answers our prayers, and trusting that we will hear his gentle and persistent call to "**Come and see**" him in all things.