

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent (A)  
(Ezekiel 37:12-14 / John 11:1-45)  
22.03.2026  
*Weakness & Feelings*

In the story of the resurrection of Lazarus, Jesus makes many important theological statements. The first one is: “Lazarus’ sickness will end not in death but in God’s glory and through it the Son of God will be glorified.” The point made here is that sickness can be an opportunity to glorify God. That is quite a challenging statement!

In order to understand it correctly, it is useful to notice that the word translated by *sickness* is used 4 times in the first 4 verses. The Greek word also means moral weakness and infirmity. It is the word that St Paul used when he wrote: “The Lord said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” (2 Co 12:9)

It seems to be implied that Lazarus’ physical sickness and death can be considered as the perfect example of all that is weak in our humanity, all that is – or appears to be – vulnerable and prone to lead us to mistakes and sins.

Here, we come back to our first statement and conclude that all that is weak within us will not end in death but can become a way for us to glorify God. Indeed, nothing in our lives is beyond the reach of God’s amazing grace. He is able to use everything for his glory as long as we allow him to do this.

That is quite encouraging for us when we are tempted to despair because of our limitations and poverty and when we are quick to condemn others and ourselves because of our or their weaknesses.

In the account of the resurrection of Lazarus, Jesus deals with a very important aspect of our lives which we experience often as a source of vulnerability and a place of struggle: namely human feelings and emotions. While Jesus addresses the death of his friend, he meets the 2 mourning sisters, and the challenging Jews who are around them, clearly he feels intensely the confusion of his personal emotions and displays this publicly.

The narrative is punctuated by several words which reveal really strong emotions: twice we are told that Jesus loved Lazarus (v. 1, 36), that he wept (v. 35), and twice that he felt deep inner distress (v. 33, 38). The Greek word translated quite mildly by *in great distress* and *still sighing*, originally means *to snort with anger*.

Clearly as Fran Ferder writes it, we do not believe in “an emotionally frozen Messiah.” Fran Ferder adds: “It was not an over-controlled Redeemer who begged for companionship and perspired in agony during his last hours. Jesus did not feel for effect. He felt because feeling is human, and being fully human is not incompatible with being divine.” Yes Jesus was fully human and a genuine human being feels. If humans do not feel this means that there is a problem with their humanity and their identification with Christ.

The problem may be that for too long we have been told that perfection in God, the Father and in his Son Jesus implied absence of emotions and feelings. And we wrongly deduced from this distorted theology that holiness imposes upon us utter control or even denial of all our emotions and feelings. The conclusion was that good Christians should not cry, feel anger or shout – even though Jesus did – but rather they should aim at becoming like plaster cast saints.

Such an approach is in complete opposition with the image of God revealed by Jesus Christ. Edmond L. B. Cherdonnier, an Episcopalian biblical scholar wrote: “Psychiatry provides mounting evidence that the healthy personality is open and vulnerable, willing to take

risks and able to bear the hurt. This describes the biblical God par excellence (...). It is just possible that our resistance to the idea of divine pathos (...) is motivated by the fear of taking the same risks that God takes.”

For us perfection means that we feel and, like Jesus, deal with all our feelings in a life-giving way.

Last year Pope Leo, commenting on Jesus crying out in loud voice on the Cross, said: “We are accustomed to thinking of crying out as something disorderly, to be repressed.

The Gospel confers an immense value to our cry, reminding us that it can be an invocation, a protest, a desire, a surrender. It can even be the extreme form of prayer, when there are no words left. In that cry, Jesus gave all that he had left: all his love, all his hope.” (*General Audience*, 10.09.2025)

Here we have both the challenge and the way forward presented to us. Instead of becoming like stones, cold and unmoved by what is going on within and around us, we should bring all our feelings to the Lord in prayer. There, transformed by the Spirit, these can become an energy for good and for life, an energy which would spur us on to deal properly with all the situations we encounter in life.

If we want to live fully, as human beings and not like stones, we must allow ourselves to be in touch with the feelings that are in our hearts and attune them to the heart of God. We cannot remain aloof, cool and distant, when we hear and see what is happening to migrants in the United States, to the people of Iran, Lebanon, Ukraine, Gaza, and to all who are not respected, listened to respectfully, and cared for properly.

For us the point is not to brood over our feelings or to bottle them up but to channel them to words and actions that give life, as was the case for Jesus with Lazarus. We can call others out of their tombs, out of their places of darkness and oppression, of violence and fears, of loneliness and rejection. We can be life-bearers to all those we meet.

Let us allow the Lord to remove from within us our hearts of stone so that he may give us hearts of flesh (cf. Ez 36:26). Our God, in Jesus Christ, took the risk to feel what we feel. In our turn let us not be afraid to feel and to choose love and do good.