

**April 2, 2017 Untie Him And Let Him Go Homily:** Brothers and sisters, once upon a time serial westerns were very popular with the American viewing public. For years, westerns ranked among the most popular shows on evening television. If you are of a certain age, you may remember “*Bonanza*”, “*The Rifleman*”, “*The Big Valley*”, “*Have Gun Will Travel*”, “*Bat Masterson*”, and so many others of that genre. In many episodes one of the players is taken hostage, bound hand and foot, and gagged. Immobilized and unable to speak, he resembles a living corpse. But in a typical Hollywood ending, the hero eventually arrives on the scene to free the one held captive. So often we heard the words of his liberator, a Lucas McCain, for example, "Untie him and let him go free".

In today's gospel Jesus performs the greatest sign of his public ministry. He brings Lazarus back to life, his mortal life. Jesus is close to Lazarus (a name meaning "God helps") and his two sisters, Martha and Mary.

The story reminds us that the tomb is the ultimate prison. There is no chance for a pardon or parole. Death appears to have the final word, the last laugh. It is clear that Jesus enters into a fierce struggle with the power of death. In this instance, he takes one hostage from the jaws of the grave. He calls Lazarus out of bondage into freedom. “Untie him and let him go,” cries Jesus. God's glory is to free people and let them go!

In Dostoyevsky's classic novel, “*Crime and Punishment*”, the main character, Raskolnikov, has committed a heinous crime, the murder of a cruel and selfish pawnbroker. He is burdened by a sense of guilt for what he has done and is plunged into despair. Sonia, a prostitute and friend of the tormented man, insists that there is a way out of his self imposed tomb. She turns to the eleventh chapter of John's gospel and begins to read the account of the raising of Lazarus. When Christ cries out, "Lazarus, come forth", she impresses upon her friend the possibility of a new life awaiting him. Redemption is made possible by Christ. Once again, we recall the words of Christ "Untie him and let him go".

Some lessons to be derived from today's gospel.

1. Jesus shows his humanity. The death of Lazarus and the grief of his friends bring him to tears. He wept. The Greek sense of the verb suggests he was moved in the gut. It is the only instance in John's gospel that Jesus reveals his deep human emotion. Jesus is not immune to feelings of deep compassion;
2. Death is not a meaningless tragedy. It does not have the final word. It serves a larger purpose in the Father's plan;
3. The question posed by Jesus is also addressed to each one of us: “Do you believe this?” And then the response of his dear friend: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ";
4. For those of us who are buried in the tomb, there is always the possibility of a light shining in the darkness. We recall the Lord's command: "Take away the stone." He wants us to come forth from our self-made tombs!

Amen!