

# Lazarus Saturday

“Let Us Go to Die with Him”

*St. Athanasius the Apostolic*

The eyes of the Lord are rays of light, which lighten those who are in the darkness and in the shadow of death. The tongue of Christ is full of life for everyone whom death has conquered. The hands of Christ are restorers of life, with which He aids all and sets them on their feet. The garments of Christ are restorers of life, by which women with issues of blood are healed. The feet of Christ are converters of the strayed sheep, which He brings back to the good fold. The commandment of Christ is a healer, by which He heals those who are leprous and cleanses them. The saliva within Christ’s mouth is a healing, sight-giving salve, by which He gives sight to the eyes of the man blind from birth.

The gaze of Christ is a restorer of life; He looked on the son of the widow as they were carrying him out dead, and restored him to life. The hand of Christ is an inviter of man to life; He came walking and calling His apostles to the Kingdom of Heaven. The passing-by of Christ is beneficent; as He was passing by He gave sight to two blind men by the wayside. The mercies of Christ are innumerable; for He had pity on five thousand men who were hungry. There were needed five barley loaves; He caused them all to eat and they were satisfied.

What shall I say? For the time would not permit me if I spoke about the mighty works which Christ did in the world and of all the wonders which no human being could number. Neither is there a zealous scribe who would be able to enumerate them and write them in a book. Water was made wine, the lame man took up his bed and walked, the demons were cast out, the dumb were caused to speak, the deaf were caused to hear, the withered hands were healed, the sea upon whose waters He walked as upon a stony rock, the fig tree on which He did not find fruit, which He caused to wither, the waves of the sea were thoroughly frightened at His speech and calmed down, and the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue leapt up, stood on her feet, and lived, when the hand of her Creator took hold of her. These things have we spoken and disclosed concerning the mighty works which Christ did.

Moreover, give heed that we may recall what was read to us today, and fulfill it because of the administration of the holy and universal liturgy, this which summons us to the holy bridal chamber. The word, which was read to us today in the Gospel according to John, leads me to a great and joyful teaching. What, indeed, is the word which was read to us? Give heed that we may declare it!

“Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, ‘Lord behold, he whom You love is sick.’

Note well the statement and the saying of the Gospel. It says, “It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil” O this great wonder which is promised! “You, indeed, have anointed me with an ointment; I myself shall anoint you with the oil of the unbreakable seal, in My Name and the Name of My Father and the Holy Spirit. You, indeed, Mary, a name worthily beloved, have wiped My feet with the hair of your head; I Myself shall wipe away your sins which you have committed from your youth until now. I shall hold you fast in My hand and give joy to My soul.

You, indeed, have anointed Me with the ointment of this world in the gladness of your soul; I Myself shall anoint you with the ointment of heaven—that which came down upon Me, upon the Jordan at the time when I received baptism. Verily, I say to you, Mary, that in whatever place this Gospel is preached in all the world, moreover that which this woman has done will be spoken of in remembrance of her.”

Now, indeed, was her brother Lazarus ill. His disciples said to Jesus, “Lord, behold, he whom you love is sick.” O this great favor which He showed these three relations! Lazarus, indeed, did Jesus love; likewise Martha was serving the supper of Christ; once again Mary wiped His feet with her hair. They were like a cord of three strands, which He was not in a hurry to cut.

Then after this He said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” The disciples said to Him, “Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again? Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles because the light is not in him” (Jn. 11:7-10). Consider, moreover, what I have said, that the light is Christ. Everyone who will walk in His commandments will not be laid hold of

by evil. These twelve hours, which are in the day, are the twelve apostles. The devil, on the other hand, is compared with the night. He who walks in the will of the devil will stumble, because he has not the light of Christ. Jesus said to them, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps” (Jn. 11:11).

Jesus said to them, “If he has fallen asleep, he will rise again.” But Jesus was speaking of his death, but they truly thought that He was speaking of the sleep of slumber. For all who have fallen asleep since Adam until now, who have fallen asleep in Christ, at the day of resurrection will He call to them in His divine voice, and they will all rise immediately incorruptible and act like those who have arisen from forgetfulness because of sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him” (Jn. 11:14, 15).

Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (Jn. 11:16). “Thomas, how do you fear death, when the Life goes with you? You wilt know Him now, because He whom they will put to death among us, is He Who seizes another from the hand of death. Follow Me, Thomas, and I shall show you the type of My resurrection, which I shall display to the whole creation. Come with Me, and I shall show you the body of Lazarus which has decayed and spread abroad a foul smell; and the manner in which I shall call to his soul and cause it to enter his body again. Follow Me, Didymus, and I shall cause you to behold the hands of Lazarus and his feet which were bound with the cords and bands of death; I shall give them life again, and they will minister to Me. Go with Me, Didymus, and I shall show you the eyes of Lazarus, which have closed, and there is no sight in them; I shall open them again and I shall give them sight. Come to the tomb with Me, Thomas, and I shall show you the mouth of the grave closed, and his tongue decayed, and no breath in his nostrils. I shall open its mouth, and I shall cause his tongue to speak, and I shall give him breath. Come with Me, all My holy disciples, and you will hear Me when I shall call in My divine voice; and Lazarus will hear Me and will walk and come to Me alive.” And when He had said these things, He went with His disciples to go to him.

Now Martha said to Jesus, “Lord if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (Jn. 11:24-26). I am the voice of life, which awakens the dead. I am the good odor, which takes away the foul odor. I am the voice of joy, which

takes away sorrow and grief. I am the good Teacher who rejoices in those who hear Me. I am the comfort of those who are in grief; those who belong to Me do I give them joy. I am the joy of the whole world. All My friends do I gladden, and I rejoice with them. I am the Bread of Life; those who are hungry do I satisfy with every good thing. I am the Physician, the Healer of all who are sick. Come to Me, I will heal you for nothing. I am the Shepherd who seeks after all His strayed sheep. Come to Me! Why are you weeping, Martha, and are disturbed and lamenting? I am He who will give you your brother alive, and he will speak with you. "Do you believe this?" She said, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (Jn. 11:26, 27). I have known You, that You are the resurrection of the whole creation."

And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary, her sister, saying, "The Teacher has come and is calling for you." As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him (Jn. 11:28, 29). Then when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled and His eyes shed tears. And He said, "Where have you laid him?" You are He Who said to them previously, my Savior, "Lazarus our friend sleeps." And now You ask, "Where have you laid him?" Observe the God Who has created the heaven and the earth and sea and the things in it, Who sits upon the cherubim in the seventh heaven, and Whose eyes behold those who are buried in the underworld, asking, "Where have you laid him?" (Jn. 11:32-34). Is He, then, without knowledge of where they have laid him? Heaven forbid! But since the Jews are always ignorant about this, He wished to cause them to be witnesses to what He was about to do, in order that they might not find a word to say or be able to deny the mighty works which Christ did.

They said, "Lord, come and see." And Jesus wept. O this great love and this great affection of Christ for His saints! Why do You weep, Lord, when the life of the whole creation is in Your hands? Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone" (Jn. 11:37-39). Observe the wisdom of this merciful God. Is He not able to cause the stone to roll away? Yea, I tell you, He is able. But He was saying these things on account of witnesses, in order that they might not find a way of denying, if they wished.

Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, “Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days” (Jn. 11:39). His whole body has poured forth pus; his eyeballs have dropped out; and his interior organs have become useless. How, moreover, will the body rise again? His hands and his feet and all his parts are bound with grave clothes, and his head is bound with a napkin. The whole body is bound with cloths lest it dissolve and fall to pieces. And how will he rise again, and all of those there? Again I know that all things which You wilt ask of God, God will give them to You.” But Christ, the Comfort of those who are in grief, answered and said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” (Jn. 11:40).

They took, then, the stone there from the mouth of the tomb. The whole crowd marveled, witnessing the smell of pus of Lazarus who was decayed. He had rotted so that they were not able to approach within the tomb on account of the smell of his body and its decay. But into the midst came Jesus, the Storehouse, which is full of life, the Mouth which is full of sweet odor, the Tongue which frightens death, the Mighty One in His commands, the Joy of those who are sorrowful, the Rising of those who have fallen, the Resurrection of the dead, the Assembly of the strong, the Hope of the hopeless.<sup>3</sup> He came and stood openly by the mouth of the tomb, with the preparations of salvation in His divine mouth. Now all the crowd was standing and beholding and wondering what He would do in starting to raise him from the dead. Now the body was lying dead; but God Himself was standing over it, looking down upon him and grieving for him. First, He raised His eyes to heaven and spoke with His Father in a gentle voice, saying, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me” (Jn. 11:41,42).

But when He had said these things, He ceased speaking with His Father, and turned to the body of Lazarus, which was lying without breath in it, nor movement in any limb. He called at the mouth of the tomb in His divine voice, “Lazarus, come forth!” Immediately the voice of Christ awoke him who was slumbering, like a man who has arisen who was asleep. He said to him, “Come forth. Behold, I am standing by you. I am your Lord; you are the work of My hands. Why have you not known Me, who in the beginning Myself formed Adam from the earth and gave him breath? Open your mouth yourself, in order that I may give you breath. Stand upon your feet and receive strength to yourself; for I am the Strength of the whole creation. Stretch out your hands

and I shall give them strength; for I am the straight staff. I command the foul odor to depart from you; for I am the sweet odor of the trees of paradise. Behold, the prophecy of Isaiah the prophet will be fulfilled in you, namely, 'I shall open your tombs and I shall bring you forth.' Open your mouth and speak with Me; it is I Who command you. Cast from you the fear, and know Me, that I am the living God. Do not be frightened about the things which you have seen; for I have taken you out of their hands. Observe the place where you were sleeping, that it is full of pus and foul odor. How have they come out of your body? Cast from you the corruption of the Valley of Death, as again you have seen the Life, which is I Who am standing by you. Do not be disturbed about what you have seen, for they are greatly disturbed since you have received strength and entered into the world again. Be strong about your ministry. Notice the place where you are standing, that you are inside a tomb, in order that you may know that I have taken you out of the hand of death. Observe the grave clothes, which cover your body, in order that you may know that I have placed you in the world again after you had become a stranger to it. Come out of the tomb; it is I Who command you."

The dead man, indeed, came forth, with his hands and his feet bound with grave clothes, and his face bound with a napkin. Jesus said, "Loose him and let him go." Notice particularly the saying, "And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave-clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Loose him and let him go'" (Jn. 11:44). How did he come forth with his hands and his feet bound so that he was not able to walk? Who raised him up, being buried? For truly he came forth with the grave clothes covering his body, and his hands and his feet bound; and his eyes were not uncovered, for truly there was a napkin bound about his head and his face; and he came forth with no man to support him. How did he come forth, my faithful one, except by the command of our Savior Who raised him? Moreover, He said to those standing by, "Loose him." What, therefore, is the meaning of this saying, my Savior? You have granted him life after the fourth day. You have brought him forth from the tomb with no one to lift him up. Why, on the other hand, did You not command the grave clothes to loose themselves, in order that the unbelieving might not touch him, although You know them better, my Savior? "But My wish is not this," He said. "For I have brought him forth, you yourselves come release him, in order that your own hands themselves may testify to you that you have not believed Me. For I have not done this in the case of Lazarus alone, but I did it again another time in Cana of Galilee, when I was invited to their wedding feast and I had the power to cause them to find

the water jars full of water. No one filled them; but I said, 'Fill the water jars with water.' And they found that they had become wine as a witness to them."

Now they loosed Lazarus, and all the crowd saw Him speaking quite openly with Lazarus, whose body was clothed. This one who had arisen came forth from the tomb with all of his members full of life in the life of Christ. The eyes, which had closed so as never to open, opened again filled with light and saw everyone. The head, which had been bound with a napkin, loosed itself and became strong again and bowed to Christ. The ears, which had been closed by the stroke of death, opened again and heard Christ calling in the tomb in His divine voice. His nose, which had been a stranger to the breath of life, functioned again and smelt the sweet odor of Christ. The tongue, which had ceased speaking forever, moved once more, stretched, and praised God. The lips, which had closed so as not to speak again, opened once more and spoke with the Son of God. The mind, which had dissolved so as not to speak or to think or to be able to see a man to know him or to be able to perceive anything, became strong again and knew its Creator. All the members, which had decayed and dissolved in the earth, became alive again and ministered to the body. The feet, which had been bound so as never to walk, were loosed again and stretched and ministered patiently to Christ Jesus, the Son of God.

The prophecy of David was fulfilled in the case of Lazarus, when he says, "The Lord will loose those who are bound. The Lord will cause those who have fallen to stand. The Lord will instruct the blind. The Lord loves the righteous." All these were fulfilled in the case of the body of Lazarus, which Christ loosed, being bound; He set him up, after he had fallen; He opened his eyes, being blind; and, furthermore, He loves them all. For his sister told us this at the time when she said to the Savior, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick" (fn. 11:3). Furthermore it said, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" (Jn. 11:5). O this great grace! O this great praise which rejoices everyone who hears it! O this great fame which no one will be able to prevent! O this great boldness which God granted to men! O this promised fruit which these good workmen joyfully acquired for themselves! O this great and holy light in which these blessed ones walk!

But the Jews who came with Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their brother Lazarus saw the things which Jesus did and believed in Him; but the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!" (Jn. 12:19). O the evil shepherds who scatter the sheep of Christ! O the corrupt shepherds who scatter the herd of

which God made them the head! O the merciless shepherds who tear into pieces the sheep instead of the wolves! O the unclean shepherds who foul the pasture of the sheep! “The good among My sheep have you devoured with insatiable eyes. The wool have you given to yourselves. The weak have you not strengthened; the scattered have you not assembled; the strayed have you not sought; the fallen have you not raised; the strong have you not employed; the sick have you not healed. My sheep are scattered because they have no shepherd.”

“For this reason, lawless shepherds, hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Lord says, ‘I shall seek after My sheep by your hand; and I shall take My vengeance on you in My wrath and My anger; and I shall bring My wrath upon you in accordance with your lawless acts; and I shall send My curse upon you and scatter your counsel and take away My countenance from you, because I hate you.’ For I am He Who will pasture My sheep. I shall seek them and gather them that there may be one flock and one shepherd. The scattered shall I gather; the weak shall I strengthen; the sick shall I heal; the strayed shall I bring back to Myself; that I may be to them God, and that they may be to Me a people.” All these sayings have I spoken concerning the high priests of the Jews, because they attempted to disparage the resurrection of Lazarus, in order that no one might believe on the mighty works which Christ did and be saved.

When the crowd took the palm branches from the date palms and went before Christ as He was about to go up to the feast, all of them bore witness that He had called Lazarus forth from the grave and had raised him from the dead. Because of this, this great throng believed on Him when they heard that He had done this sign. For all the men had come out of the tomb before they buried him and closed the mouth of the tomb. A great wonder seized them all when they heard that he was alive again; even though this is truly a great wonder to hear it about a man that he has arisen from the dead after being four days dead.

But the lawless ones took counsel full of guile to kill Lazarus also, because a crowd of the Jews came on his account to see him alive again; and believed on Jesus.

But Jesus, then, six days before the Pascha, came to Bethany, the place where He raised Lazarus from the dead. Now they prepared a supper for Him there, and Martha was serving. Lazarus, however, was one of those reclining with Him. Mary, moreover, took a pound of ointment, pure nard, costly in price, and poured it upon His head, as He was reclining. She anointed His feet with



the ointment and wiped them with the hair of her head. The whole house was filled with the odor of that ointment. You have seen this great public favor, that Lazarus was one of those who were reclining with Jesus; not only that He gave him life again and took him from the hand of death but also that He granted him this great honor of eating with Him at His supper. O these great favors which God grants to those who love Him and keep His commandments!

Moreover, you have seen the favor well fulfilled. Lazarus was reclining, eating with Jesus. For He relied on His holy apostles to suffer with mankind, when He said to them, "Behold, I shall establish My covenant with you, that you may eat and drink with Me at the table of My Kingdom. And you will sit upon your twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel. Lazarus, on the other hand, ate and drank with My Father. Come to Me, Lazarus, and I shall take away the evil odor which is in your flesh, over which death ruled; and I shall give you the sweet odor. Behold, I shall go to Jerusalem, and everyone will see you going with Me in this body in which you have slept in the grave for four days. Afterward I gave you life, for truly again you yourself have served others; for in accordance with the measure which a man measures, it will be measured to himself."

Hail to you, Lazarus, because Christ has granted you this great honor beyond all those whom he has healed! For these fled to Him and besought Him to heal them. You wish to know; listen and I shall instruct you. First, then, the nobleman went to Him and besought Him, and his son was healed. Likewise the centurion, when his son was paralyzed, came and besought Him. He said, "It is I Who shall go and heal him." Now when the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue died, her father went and besought Him, until He came and raised his daughter. The two blind men who were sitting beside the way, when they heard that Jesus was to pass by, cried out, "Have mercy upon us, Son of David." The man who was a leper came to Him and asked Him, and He caused his flesh to be cleansed. Again, as He was coming down the mountain, a man besought Him, "Lord, have mercy upon me, because the only son that I have has a demon." And He cast out the demon, and his son was whole from that day. Other multitudes of signs Christ did without number; as they all besought Him, whom He had not yet healed.

Now Lazarus, on the other hand, did Christ love. But when he died, Christ went this interval with His twelve apostles until He came to him and gave him life; not only the life of this place, but that of the other place did He grant to him. You have heard, moreover, my beloved brethren, the great honor of these

people and the variation in the esteem of each one. Now Lazarus did the Lord love, as he was reclining with Him at supper. Martha herself was taking great care with the service and was ministering to Christ with all her heart. Mary herself was seated at the feet of Jesus and kissing them. The vessel of ointment of pure nard was in her hands, and she was anointing Him on His feet and wiping them with the hair of her head. The whole desire of her heart cleaves to Him in an embraceless token. The whole house was full of the odor of the ointment. For this reason there was nothing evil in her life at all, but rather her conversation was in heaven, full of sweet odor and virtue. Christ beholds them with His divine eyes and is cheered and rejoices over the purity of their mode of life and the offering to Him of their undefiled service.

O this kissing of the feet of Christ! O the holy woman because of how her deed succeeded! O this famous purified one! O this wiping of the feet of God, which caused the forgiveness of the sins of the repentant woman! O this holy and pure anointing, because it effected a permanent cure of the soul of the woman! O the greatness of the loving-kindness of God, which we shall not be able to reckon! O this goodness, of which there is no measure to its greatness, and which extends to the whole creation! He provides for them all and has mere)' upon them and forgives all their sins, because great are the mercies which He shows to him who is good and His creature; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to Whom be glory and honor now and forevermore. Amen.