

5th Sunday of Lent, April 7th, 2019

“Lazarus, come out!”

Story Robert Ingersoll, 19th century agnostic. Ingersoll suggested to an audience of believers that Jesus' words, “Lazarus, come out!” were simply a prearranged cue to have Lazarus (who had faked death) to gloriously strut out of the tomb where he had hidden, when he heard Jesus called his name. Emphasizing his point, Ingersoll said, “Why did Jesus say, ‘Lazarus, come out!?’ Why didn't he just say, ‘Come out!’” A man in the audience shouted, “Because if my Master had said that, EVERY PERSON in that there cemetery would have come out!””

No doubt these three words, “Lazarus, come out!”, are the climax of the gospel story just proclaimed. Perhaps to get into the story we just need to change one word, the first one. I suggest your own first name, ie. George, come out! We are called to come out of the graves that we sometimes dig for ourselves.

The French writer, Guy de Maupassant, tells the story of a peasant named Hauchecorne. A frugal man, he picked up a perfectly good piece of string. As he picked it up he saw a man he had quarreled with earlier, the village harness maker. He quickly hid the string in his pocket. Later in the day the theft of a purse was reported. The harness maker told the police about Hauchecorne's strange behavior and he was arrested.

News spread. People shouted at him. He grew angrier and angrier. The next day the purse was found, and he was declared innocent. But he could not let go of his anger. It consumed him. Obsessed with his grievance, he became ill. In his last breath he continued to proclaim his innocence. He murmured over and over again, “a little bit of string, a little bit of string.”

All of us are somehow bound up or trapped by some obsession, some distraction, some behavior that prevents us from being the kind of spouse, parent, child, friend or person that we want to be. We let anger, disappointment, cynicism and despair tie us up and bury us in tombs of our own making. We become walking dead or zombies. Perhaps that's why the present fascination our culture has with zombies exists.

The Christ calls us to come out of those graves of anger and guilt, rip away our shrouds of pain and distrust AND LIVE. Come out! Pope Francis has challenged us to focus on God's Mercy throughout his pontificate. If we don't forgive and seek reconciliation, our own anger can bury us. In God's mercy, and through the Church we are set free to come out and live. So great his mercy, that Christ weeps for us in his great love for us. Yes, God is good...all the time.