

**May I speak in the name of the living God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Another very long Gospel Reading today.  
But it would be very difficult to shorten  
without losing a real sense of the timing of  
events and feelings and emotions of those  
involved.

I would like to highlight just three points from  
the gospel for us to hold onto, as we move  
towards Good Friday and Easter – our  
celebration of the death and resurrection of  
Christ.

Like Mary and Martha, we are friends of  
Jesus. Just like them, we can call upon him  
for help in our time of need. However, like  
them, we need to acknowledge, that  
sometimes we need to wait for the full power  
of God's love to be at work. However,  
painful or however difficult that wait might be.

We live in an instant age.

Instant access to money at the bank.

Instant Coffee,

Instant cameras,

Fast food,

e-mail messages that can be sent and received instantly.

We live in an age, where we press a button and something happens – instantly... and when it doesn't we are very impatient.

So the whole idea of having to wait for a response is something that we find very difficult. Especially if it is having to wait for God – who is all seeing, all powerful, and ever present.

But, that is the point. God is all seeing. Our vision is always limited to the immediate. God is able to see, the most appropriate

point in which to act – a point, which we are usually only able to see after the event.

However, difficult, however frustrating it might be, like Mary and Martha, we have to trust and wait, knowing that God has heard, and that he will respond when the time is right for him to show his love most fully.

The second thing that I would like us to focus on from our Gospel reading today, is the truth that Jesus is alongside us in our times of pain and suffering as one who understands the very depths of our human feelings and emotions.

Although Jesus is divine, he is also fully human. Here and elsewhere in the Gospels, we see him experiencing our human emotions. In sharing Martha and Mary's pain and grief, Jesus stood at the grave of Lazarus and wept.

Through his tears, Jesus identified with the very real sense of pain and loss that we all know when someone we love passes from us.

Just as Jesus was indeed alongside Mary and Martha in their time of need, he is alongside us too.

Through the power of the spirit. Through prayer. Through each other – Christ is there.

During recent weeks, I have shared in the pain and grief of several families, all of whom have lost someone they loved dearly. Nothing that I can say, will bring their loved one back. But, I pray and trust that the words I say, the fact that I show I care by being there, says something of the love and compassion that God has for us in these times of loss – as does the love and compassion of their family, friends and neighbours, who are sharing that journey through grief with them.

It is always a great help to know that we are not alone in experiencing a particular situation. There are others who are going through it with us. Others who have perhaps experienced something before us, and who can therefore share something of the knowledge and insights that they have gained.

Others who are also seeking to come to terms with what has happened through prayer and reading of the Bible.

Everyone's experience of loss and grief will be different, but we can all be a support and a help for each other.

We all ask the questions like those at the grave of Lazarus – “could not he who opened the eyes of the blind, have kept this man from dying?”

As we grapple with questions like this, I would like to share with you a few words written by a professor of theology whose son had been killed by a drunken driver. He writes this:

“There are no answers to some questions, but you know that. You are a fellow traveller. Fellow travellers reach out to each other, accompany each other when their need is greatest. They do not let the lack of concrete answers prevent the healing process from beginning.

Friends offer compassion, not easy answers, and in that offering, they both find comfort.”  
As we are comforted, particularly by the presence of someone who has already been there, hope arises out of faith that God too is present.

The final area I would like to focus on, is the wonderful promise contained in today's Gospel.

Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, they shall live."

Jesus spoke these words to Martha, but he speaks them to each of us too.

In the raising of Lazarus from the tomb, we are given a wonderful glimpse of the resurrection Christ promises us – as ultimately we pass from this life, into the new life of his heavenly kingdom.

In raising Lazarus from the tomb, Jesus shows us in a tangible way, that his own resurrection that we shall celebrate on Easter Day, is something that we too can share in.

We all know that after life, comes death. But Jesus shows us, that if we believe and trust in him – after death, comes life – a new and wonderful life in his heavenly kingdom.

The wonderful promise that we are given in today's Gospel then, is that  
after tears, comes joy,  
after darkness, comes light,  
after doubt, comes faith,  
after death, come life.

As we walk with Christ the way of the cross during the remaining days of Lent – a journey of pain and sacrifice which we recall in our hymns today - may we do so with a real sense of hope and gratitude in our hearts, that Christ who was to go through the darkness of death, did so, in order that we might share in the radiant light of eternal life.

Amen.