

Sunday 22nd March 2026; Passion Sunday. Benefice Holy Communion, Oswaldkirk

This week we concluded our Lent course looking at the third and fourth elements of the practise of Lectio Divina – prayer and contemplation. Similarly, I attended the Post Alpha session at St Ben's a couple of weeks ago looking at the Lord's Prayer which ended with the group gathering in a circle and each saying a prayer request for the person sat next to them. It was an incredibly moving time and reinforced my desire to have times when we can prayer together in small groups or pairs. So, as we go into Holy Week next week, I would again make the request I have been making since my arrival for a prayer group or groups!

On the importance of prayer, some words from today's Gospel, *"It is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."*

The dramatic account of the raising of Lazarus, as well as showing us Jesus' power over death, also tells us about prayer.

So, in the style of Lectio, lets pick out some sentences in this story that do that. Firstly, the words of the message from Martha and Mary sent to Jesus while on his way, *"Lord, he whom you love is ill"*.

If you think of that message prayerfully as Lectio teaches us, the despairing sisters are hoping that Jesus will heal their brother, but they don't ask for that in their message, which only informs Jesus of the situation. This then leaves room for Jesus to address their concern in whatever way that He sees fit. The prayer then teaches us that when we make our requests to Jesus, we must trust him to meet our needs as He sees fit too, not necessarily as we want, even in the gravest of situations.

The question to ask then is what is happening in your life that you want Jesus involved in and do with as He sees fit, that leaves room for him to answer in different ways and are you prepared to trust Him on the outcome?

Secondly, we see the words, *"Though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus,"* the story tells us, *"He stayed two days longer where he was."* This tells us that having initially responding s to their request, Jesus seemingly let Lazarus die. Why? Because in so doing He knew that he would raise him up and reveal God's glory. Jesus therefore *intentionally* delayed answering their request because he had a plan that Martha, Mary and Lazarus could not have imagined.

Another question - has God ever delayed answering a prayer of yours? Maybe he is doing that now. If that is the case, can you trust and have faith because He has another plan in mind? Lazarus's illness and death is going to be used for God's glory, Jesus tells those around him, and that is why he is delaying

going to him. If it seems then when we pray God is delaying answering maybe it means that He might be using that delay for a higher purpose, to His glory, that we can't see either, until the plan is revealed to us.

Thirdly, the words, "*Jesus began to weep*", to which the people say, "See how He loved him". This tells us that our world is filled with sadness, and brokenness, and death, and because Jesus loves Lazarus, Martha and Mary, He experiences the pain and sorrow of death more than any of us can and He expresses His compassion in His perfect humanity and weeps.

This too tells us something about our prayers. Have you ever imagined Jesus weeping with you when you are weeping in prayer? Jesus weeps with us because He feels our pain and sadness, and through his humanity He takes our pain, sorrow and tears to the Father and the Spirit, in the mystery of the Trinity who weeps with us too. That is why Jesus gave up his divinity, and lived among us, and died for us, to become for us the resurrection and the life, that even when we die, we will live, bringing an end to all suffering and pain, so that one day he could wipe every tear from our eyes, forever.

Prayer may not take away our tears, but it does help us to see that our sadness and tears are just one part of a much bigger story, to remember that when we weep, our loving Saviour weeps with us, and our tears are taken into the Trinity to be transformed.

Our final words. We are told that before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he "*looked upward, and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me.'*" This prayer shows us the importance of being *thankful* in our prayers. "*Father, I thank you,*" Jesus said. Shouldn't we be thankful too?

The account of the raising of Lazarus teaches us the wonderful ways in which Jesus wants to be involved in our lives, through prayer. Lectio Divina call this 'contemplation', which is asking Jesus to become more involved in our lives through prayer, having a conversation with Him, requesting Him to take all your needs to Him and to trust Him even when answers appear to be delayed, knowing that while we wait, even with when we weep, we can be comforted knowing that Jesus weeps with us, and we can give thanks to God knowing our prayers will be answered.

Thanks be to God. Amen.