

## **Fifth Sunday of Lent – Homily – 03-29-2020**

About three years ago I helped out at a penance service at Sandusky for Fr. Bob Schikora. That evening he told a story that he had heard from Fr. John Ricardo about the events of a little village in the north of Spain.

It was located in a mountainous region and was quite insulated from the rest of the world and rarely did they have any visitors. But if they did they would typically just pass through and stay for a day or two at most.

But on one occasion a family arrived and stayed for a surprisingly long period of time which made the townspeople quite uncomfortable. Several weeks passed by but they showed no signs of leaving.

At one point there was an emergency in the village. One of the locals got very sick and the village doctor couldn't seem to help him. So the wife and mother of the family that had arrived a few weeks earlier came to the assistance of the sick woman and, having been trained herself as a physician, was able to restore her to good health.

But still they were not fully accepted by all the townspeople although many began to change their minds.

Then there was another crisis in which another member of the family was able to offer his own expertise to solve another problem.

Finally, the people of the town warmed up to them and took them into their friendship and made them a full-fledged part of their community. Over time the new residents began to open up to the community as well.

At one point they told the villagers in confidence that there was a coup d'état in the capital of Spain and they were a high ranking family in the service of the king and had fled for their lives.

Within two days the military arrived and arrested the entire family who were taken back to Spain and executed.

Do you know who turned them in? It was the mayor of the little hamlet.

Relative to the rest of the townsfolk, he had money, power, and enjoyed all the pleasures that life affords. Naturally, he was frequently the center of attention among his fellow citizens. Maybe he wanted more and to get it he was trying to curry favor with the new government.

Regardless, with this talented and highly cultured new family in town his popularity began to wane and his true colors showed themselves while the ordinary townsfolk took the family into their own and gave them their love and trust.

In today's gospel, we heard that many Jews who saw what Jesus did raising Lazarus from the dead began to believe in him – they gave him their love and trust.

It was the scribes and the Pharisees who had money and power, and enjoyed all the pleasures that life affords who opposed Jesus. They were frequently the center of attention and when that began to wane they also showed their true colors and ultimately called for Jesus' crucifixion.

I wonder how many of the scribes and Pharisees recalled the story told by Jesus about the rich man and the poor man named Lazarus.

If you recall, the rich man enjoyed everything this life had to offer and when he had died he went to a place of suffering while Lazarus, who was poor and abandoned and had nothing in this life, was at peace in the bosom of his Father Abraham after he had died.

The rich man begged Father Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers so that they might be converted and not follow him below.

But Abraham said to the rich man, they have Moses and the prophets let them listen to them. The rich man replied but Father Abraham, if you send Lazarus back from the dead they will listen to him.

And Abraham said to him, if they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they listen even if one should come back from the dead.

Strangely this is very much what we heard today. A man named Lazarus was raised from the dead. Jesus did this to convert those who still refused to believe. But he also did this to prepare them and us for His own death and resurrection.

John made this clear when he pointed to the stone being rolled back, as well as Lazarus' burial cloths and head covering – all details he would later point out in Jesus' empty tomb.

Jesus' resurrection and Lazarus' as well points to our own resurrection provided that we live according to the Spirit that dwells in us. But many at the time of Jesus were in the flesh and dead because of sin and the same is still unfortunately true today. As Saint Paul said to the Romans in the second reading, "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

Of course remaining in the flesh can mean different things for different people but it usually falls into one of three categories – money, power or pleasure – and typically the three overlap.

Ultimately, Lazarus represents humanity without Jesus, dead because of sin. But Jesus wants to liberate everyone from sin and raise us to life.

Jesus is crying out again in a loud voice, to each one of us, come out!

From all that binds us – money, power or pleasure – whatever may bind us...come out!