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Memorial of Sts Martha, Mary and Lazarus

Date: Tuesday, July 29, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Exodus 33:7–11, 34:5b–9, 28
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 103:6–13 | **Response:** Psalm 103:8a
Gospel Acclamation: John 8:12
Gospel Reading: John 11:19–27 (Proper)
Preached at: the Chapel of Richartz House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe.

Dear friends in Christ,

Sometimes, the holiest ground is not the mountain, but the middle of the mess—the chaos of mourning, the tension of unanswered prayers, the grief that stiffens the voice and silences the soul. Today, we find Martha standing in that place—between belief and bewilderment, between the tomb and the promise, between a brother's death and a Saviour's strange delay.

And yes—it is a delay. Not an accident, not divine forgetfulness, but something harder still: purposeful silence. For the Gospel tells us plainly, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Even this waiting, even this weeping, is not wasted. It is held in a mystery far greater than Martha can yet understand. And perhaps that is how it is for us too: when God does not arrive on our schedule, it does not mean He has abandoned the story. It means He is telling it in His own way.

The Gospel today (John 11:19–27) opens not with a miracle but with mourning. Lazarus is dead. And Jesus is late. Martha meets Him not with hymns but with a haunting sentence: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." It is not an accusation, but it isn't quite trust either. It is raw. It is honest. It is the voice of many who have waited for help that never came, prayed for change that never arrived. The family who watches the clinic shelves go empty again. The parent unsure if there will be enough to send the children to school. The young person waiting for news that never comes. Martha speaks for them.

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And yet, something extraordinary happens. Jesus does not offer an explanation. He offers Himself. “I am the resurrection and the life.” He doesn’t point Martha forward to a distant future or back to her past. He calls her into the present—into a relationship not with ideas but with His person. Resurrection is no longer a doctrine to assent to. It is a man standing in front of her, asking: Do you believe this?

This question, friends, is not theoretical. It is spiritual, personal, and urgent. In the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises—a time of prayer where we honestly confront our sin, our false securities, and the places we cling to illusions—we are invited to look clearly at the things in our lives that block love. To look at the tombs in our lives—the things we have buried, the dreams we have wrapped in linen and left to decay—and dare to believe that they are not beyond His power.

But Martha is not the only one in this story. Her sister, Mary, soon comes to meet Jesus as well. And though her words echo Martha’s—“Lord, if you had been here…”—her posture speaks volumes. She falls at His feet. The same feet she once anointed with costly oil. The same feet she once sat beside, listening in silence while Martha served. Mary is the stillness to Martha’s strength, the prayerful gaze that complements the practical hand. If Martha speaks for those who wrestle with God in the realm of reason, Mary speaks for those who can only weep. And it is her tears that move Jesus to tears. “Jesus wept.” The shortest verse in Scripture, but one of the deepest. God does not only raise the dead. He weeps for them. And for us.

And Lazarus—quiet, wrapped, bound—is no mere plot device. He is named as a friend of Jesus. Three times the text calls him “the one you love.” He represents each one of us. He is the silent witness to divine love, the one laid in darkness and brought out again into light. But unlike the resurrection we await, Lazarus’s return is temporary. He will die again. The grave will call once more. And so we remember: we believe in more than a return to this life. We believe in the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. That is our hope: that the One who called Lazarus out by name will call each of us too—not just back into breath, but forward into glory.

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This same intimate friendship, though in a different covenant, is what we see unfolding in our first reading, from Exodus (Exodus 33:7–11, 34:5b–9, 28). Moses, in the Tent outside the camp, speaks to God as one speaks to a friend. Not from a distance, but face to face. Not with fear, but with familiarity. Yet even this friendship is not simple. It comes at a cost. God has withdrawn from the camp after Israel's rebellion. Moses alone enters the Tent, carrying the hopes of a broken people. He ascends Sinai, not with the old tablets shattered in anger, but with new ones cut by his own hand. He climbs, alone, into the cloud of God's presence, into a moment of mercy where God passes by and proclaims His own name: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love."

But that name, that mercy, is not given cheaply. Moses fasts forty days. He contends with the sins of the people. He pleads for them. Intercession is costly. Mercy always is. As it was for Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, so it was for Moses. And so it must be for us. If we are to carry the tablets of a renewed covenant—whether into a family, a classroom, a city in crisis—we must climb with clean hands, but also with broken hearts.

The Psalm today (Psalm 103), that great song of forgiveness, sings with the very same language revealed on Sinai: "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and rich in compassion." These words are not theoretical. They are lived experience. The Psalmist knew betrayal, and he knew the mercy that heals. This mercy, this patient love, is not the indulgent shrug of a forgetful God. It is the fierce compassion of One who knows our frame, who remembers that we are dust, and yet crowns us with love and tenderness.

But what does it mean to live this mercy now, in this Zimbabwe of 2025—with its barren fields and hungry children, its exhausted teachers and anxious students, its weary parents and burdened priests? Mercy is not a feeling to be admired but a justice to be enacted. It must take flesh in structures—in laws, in budgets, in classrooms and clinics. It must become a social architecture that refuses to forget the dignity of every person. It is the holy defiance that says: children should not grow up without books, patients should not bleed without bandages, graduates should not wait years for work. Mercy in this land must move from prayer into policy, from liturgy into life, from intention into institution.

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Martha shows us what this kind of mercy looks like. She does not wait in silence. She comes out to meet Jesus. She speaks. She questions. But she stays. She listens. She believes. She moves from grief to grace without pretending the pain wasn't real. She grows into her faith, one sentence at a time. And Mary, in her stillness, shows us the other half of the journey: the sacred listening, the quiet surrender, the weeping that becomes prayer. And Lazarus—Lazarus shows us what it means to be loved into life again.

Today, on their feast, the Church celebrates this household of faith: Martha the active, Mary the contemplative, and Lazarus the beloved. A family who opened their home to Jesus—and were changed forever. A family like all of ours, called to friendship with Christ.

And what about us? If we were to sit in that Tent with the Lord, or stand before the tomb with Jesus—what would we say? What wounds would we bring? What beliefs would we dare to speak aloud?

Perhaps today's readings invite us to imagine that moment—not with the head, but with the heart. In the language of the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises, we are invited to be present in the scene—to stand with Martha at the road, to kneel beside Mary in tears, to watch the face of Christ as He listens, and to feel the tension in our own hearts between loss and longing, between fear and faith.

And as we descend from our Sinai or rise from the road to Bethany, may we carry this image in our hearts: the God who speaks with friends. The God who weeps. The God who waits outside our tombs with life on His lips.

Let us walk with Him.
Let us pray with Him.
Let us live for Him.

And so, I leave you with three questions, for your prayer today:

- In the silence of my heart, what tomb have I declared too far gone for God to reach?
- Like Martha and Mary, where do I need to speak honestly with Jesus—and where do I need to simply sit at His feet?

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- How is God calling me, in this place and time, to be a bearer of mercy—in my home, my ministry, and in the community around me?

Amen.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.