

Homily based on the readings from March 22, 2026 (Ezekiel 37.12-14; Romans 8.8-11; John 11.1-45)

An interesting question – which most of us have probably never stopped to consider – is why the New Testament contains four separate Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Why is there not just one single narrative, presenting all the relevant details about the life and ministry of Jesus? As it happens, in the earliest days of the Church, there actually *was* such a document – known as the *Diatessaron* – which blended together the four different accounts. Although it remained popular for several centuries – and was even read regularly at Mass – in the end, the Church decided to retain four distinct Gospels. There are several reasons for this choice, but the most important – I believe – is that each of the Gospels is *intentionally* designed to emphasize a particular set of themes and ideas.

Today's Gospel reading, although it was somewhat lengthy, is essentially a *microcosm* of the distinctive qualities of the Gospel of

John. As you may be aware, John's Gospel focuses specifically on the *divine* nature of Jesus – on his being an eternal person of the Holy Trinity. That is why, in religious artwork and imagery, this Gospel is traditionally represented by an *eagle*. Besides being a *powerful* and *dignified* creature, an eagle has the ability to see great distances from high above the ground. In other words, the Gospel of John provides us with a “God's eye view” of the events it is describing. The prologue to the Gospel – the first eighteen verses of the opening chapter – presents a *soaring* description of Christ's existence from “the beginning” and his role in the creation of the universe. The Gospel maintains this perspective *throughout* – not just in its narration, but through the words and actions of specific characters. By my count, there are *five* individuals in the Gospel of John who *explicitly* recognize and proclaim the divinity of Jesus. The first three, in order, are John the Baptist, Nathanael, and Simon Peter. The fourth and fifth are Martha and Thomas – both of whom appear in today's reading.

What we just heard, of course, is the story of the death and *resuscitation* of Lazarus – the brother of Martha and Mary. While this event is monumentally important in its *own* right – foreshadowing the eventual Resurrection of Jesus – the conversations *surrounding* it might be even *more* meaningful. First of all, we get a small but poignant illustration of the character of the Apostle Thomas. When Jesus decides to return to Judea because of Lazarus’s illness – even though the local authorities are trying to kill him – Thomas simply responds: “Let us also go to die with him.” He is not complaining or demonstrating cowardice – to the contrary, he is showing that he understands and accepts the full cost of discipleship.

The main focus of the narrative, of course, is the interaction between Jesus and Martha. The Gospel tells us that “Jesus loved Martha *and* her sister *and* Lazarus,” and we can see that from the language they use. The sisters demonstrate a frankness and honesty with Jesus that can only exist among the *closest* of friends: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” An essential component of *loving*

somebody, of course, is knowing who that person really is. Martha's recognition of Jesus is one of the clearest statements of faith in any of the four Gospels:

Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.

The only person in the Gospel of John who professes the fullness of Christ's divinity *more* directly is the Apostle Thomas – who, as we already noted, is mentioned briefly in today's reading. Near the end of the Gospel, when the Resurrected Jesus invites him to feel the marks of the nails and to touch his wounded side, Thomas simply responds: "My Lord and my God."

It is curious that both Martha and Thomas are often criticized by modern readers – Martha for complaining about her sister not doing enough work and Thomas for doubting the testimony of the other Apostles. Nevertheless, these two followers of Jesus provide the clearest and the boldest witness to his divine nature. Despite their various imperfections,

they are the ones who realize that Christ is more than just a prophet or a wise teacher. Because of their profound love for the Lord, they are able to recognize the Word made flesh – “the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.” It is no accident that it was to *Martha* that Jesus first revealed his mastery over death:

I am the resurrection and the life;
whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live,
and anyone who lives and believes in me will never die.

This message is *fundamentally* important as we approach the culmination of our Lenten journey: Jesus offers resurrection and life to all his faithful disciples – to *all* his beloved friends – but first we need to open the tomb of our *hearts* and *embrace him* for who he truly *is*.