

5th Sunday of Lent, Year A, 9 March 2008, John 11:1-:45

Throughout the Gospel of John we see a steady progression in the miracles Jesus performs...

...Jesus begins by changing water into wine at the wedding in Cana...

...tops this by performing several miraculous cures...

...and by feeding 5,000 people by multiplying fives loaves of bread and two fish...

...then, in the reading we heard today, goes beyond this by raising Lazarus from the dead...

...and then in stunning fashion displays his power most miraculously by rising from the dead.

It is only the last of these miracles...

...Christ's own resurrection...

...that is of ultimate and absolute significance.

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead...

...but eventually Lazarus did die.

All those who were miraculously healed by Jesus died eventually as well...

...as did every single one of those 5,000 people who he miraculously fed.

None of these miracles...

...as much physical good as they did for so many people...

...brought them the one ultimate and eternal good.

This good is...
...of course...
...an eternity of joy and pleasure and peace...
...united to God our Father in the Kingdom of Heaven.
This is what Christ's resurrection can give us.
This is why the miracle of Christ's resurrection stands so far above all those that preceded it.

Jesus came for this purpose...
...to die and rise...
...so that we might live forever.

But if this is what Jesus truly came to do...
...and it is...
...then why did he even bother with these other miracles?
Why did he raise Lazarus from the dead...
...and perform all these other tremendous signs?

Jesus did it to draw attention to himself.

Jesus used these lesser miracles to draw attention to himself...
...to point towards his glory, and the glory of the God the Father...

...so that it would be more likely that people would believe in his greatest miracle...

...his resurrection from the dead.

We know that not the entire world believes in Christ's resurrection from the dead.

Not even all those who were alive in it's immediate aftermath believed that this occurred.

I've studied the alternative explanations of what happened to Jesus.

Some people argue that he didn't die on the cross and rise from the dead....but only passed out and was revived.

Others have claimed that the Apostles stole his body from the tomb.

Others claim that the Apostles and other followers of Christ just somehow made the whole thing up years after the fact.

But careful study shows that these other explanations are pathetic, weak, and unconvincing.

As amazing as it is...

...the only convincing explanation for the events that surround the emergence of the Christian Church is that Jesus rose from the dead...

...physically and spiritually glorified...

...and that his empty tomb was left behind as he rose, encountered his followers, and then ascended into Heaven.

(For more information on the solid reasons for trusting the biblical accounts of Christ's resurrection see the articles under the headline "The Historical Reliability of the New Testament" which can be found on the parish website at <http://www.sspeterandpaul.net/evangelization.htm>)

Yet despite all the reasons there are to truly believe that Jesus is risen from the dead...

...somehow there are so many people who don't believe...

...and so many who want to believe this who find it so difficult to accept.

Jesus's desire to see as many people as possible accept the truth of his resurrection is why he performed so many lesser miracles.

Those who had seen Jesus raise the dead...

...give sight to the blind...

...miraculously feed the hungry...

...and yes.....even turn water into wine...

...were going to be helped by these events to be more able to believe when they did hear that Jesus was risen.

2,000 years later our ability to accept the truth of the resurrection is aided by the reliable testimony of the New Testament...

...that Jesus did live, breath, eat, teach...

...and perform miracles.

These miracles provide us with the supporting reasons...

...with the extra hope...

...that it really did happen.

That Jesus truly rose from the dead...

...giving us not just the limited goods of wine, healing, food, and physical life...

...but the ultimate good...

...the opportunity to spend eternity in Heaven with God our Father...

...if we are willing to believe in Christ's resurrection...

...if we are willing to accept this gift.