

**Reflection: All Saints  
John 11.32-44**

**All The lection is part of a longer story which begins with Jesus distant from Jerusalem. The Judeans were planning to arrest him when he and the disciples went "across the Jordan." While there, he received word from the two sisters, Mary and Martha, that Lazarus was sick. The fourth gospel wants us to know that Jesus "loved" Lazarus (11:3) and that he also loved Mary and Martha (11:5). Yet, he stayed where he was for two additional days.**

**Then, Jesus announces that they are returning to Judea. The disciples are quick to remind him that Judea is dangerous for them. He tells them that Lazarus is "asleep" and he is going to wake him. The disciples, no fools, says that if he's merely sleeping, he'll be all right. Jesus announces flatly, "Lazarus is dead," but also tells them he's glad not to have been there so that they, the disciples, might believe. Thomas, not without reason, thinks they're all going to die.**

**Jesus goes near Bethany, but appears to have stopped short of actually entering. Martha went out to meet him.**

Meanwhile, people from nearby Jerusalem show up at Mary and Martha's house to console them. They are rather ominously identified as "Judeans"--they oppose Jesus in every which way throughout the fourth gospel--though, in this case, their purpose appears benign. They are there to comfort. Still, their presence could be why Jesus did not go to Mary and Martha's house.

"Judeans" are not people he wants to run in to right off the bat in this foray onto "Judean" turf.

Martha appears not to have told Mary that Jesus was near, or, if she did, Mary agreed to stay behind. Martha tells Jesus that if he had been there, her brother would not have died. Nevertheless, she affirms Jesus' power even in the face of death. Jesus tells her Lazarus will live. Yes, she says, at the resurrection on the last day. (Martha reflects the conventional pharisaic view of resurrection.) Jesus tells her that he is "the resurrection and the life"--zoe in Greek, the life principle itself--and that those who "faith" will live. He asks Martha, "Do you faith?" She responds with three major titles for Jesus: Messiah, Son of God, "the one coming into the world."

**Martha goes back to their house and calls for Mary. She tells Mary "privately" that Jesus wants to see her. Martha must speak privately because she doesn't want to tip off the Judeans that Jesus is near. Now, finally, we are told that Jesus is not actually in the village. Martha apparently wants to keep the Judeans from knowing that he is nearby. This works, except that the Judeans, apparently intrigued by Mary's sudden departure, decide to follow her. Unwittingly, Mary leads the Judeans to Jesus.**

**Mary says exactly the same thing to Jesus that Martha had said: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Jesus responds differently to Mary than he did to Martha. Here, Jesus does not engage in high-level theological discussion as he had with Martha. Instead, surrounded by death and mourning, he was "greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply troubled." Enebrimesato has its root in the sound of a horse snorting, and expresses great anger. Etaraxen relates to fear and dread. Another possible translation: "He was enraged in spirit and agitated with fear."**

Nevertheless, this is a necessary confrontation. True life and resurrection cannot deny the reality of death. Sorrow is a part of human existence. In response to the grief and sorrow he sees, Jesus is overcome by grief and sorrow himself. Out of love and compassion, he shares fully in the sufferings of life.

Suddenly, the conversation includes "they." No longer is Jesus talking with one person, either Martha or Mary, but now, when Jesus asks where "you" (plural) have laid Lazarus, "they" say "come and see." This is ironic. The phrase "come and see" has been used to bring people to Jesus. Now, it is used to bring Jesus to face death. Confronting death, sorrow, and grief directly, Jesus weeps.

Jesus agitation continues as he comes to the tomb. "It was a cave." In mythological language, caves are places of spiritual mystery and are symbolic of the womb. Going into a cave upon death is symbolic of return to God as Mother. It is also a way of saying that new life can emerge only out of the death of the old. This is *mortificatio*, a word which appears often in medieval Christian mystical writings.

**Martha, identified as the sister of a dead man, speaks to the ghastly reality of death. "Lord, already he stinks." Jesus reminds her that if she "faithed" she would see the glory of God. (Jesus had not actually said this to Martha. He had said it to the disciples in verse four.)**

**"Raise up the stone," he says--arate ton lithon. "They raised up the stone, but Jesus raised up his eyes upward." Jesus speaks directly to God, the first time he does so in the fourth gospel. His prayer recalls the prayer of Elijah in 1 Kings 18:37: "Answer me, O Lord, so that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back."**

**Jesus cries out "with a loud voice," "Lazarus, come out!" "The dead man came out." His sheep hear his voice! (10:27) Lazarus--"the dead man"--is still wrapped in the garments of death. Jesus tells "them" to "unbind him, and let him go."**

**The major work of raising Lazarus is done, but the work is not completed until those who hear Jesus' command "unbind" Lazarus and free him from the restraints imposed by death.**

**Let us pray...**

**Source of all being, beginning and end,  
we praise you for those who have served you faithfully.**

**For the sake of Jesus Christ,  
replenish our hope in your eternal kingdom,  
that we may have life in all its fullness,  
unfettered by the fear of death. Amen.**