

Homily for the Faithful Departed

November 6, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Parish Requiem, Mass IV: Revelation 7:9–17; Psalm 121; John 11:21–27

Today’s gospel lesson, from the most powerful narrative of John’s gospel, the Raising of Lazarus, the question whose answer matters most is asked and answered: “Jesus said to [Martha], “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world.”

It is worth noting the role women play in this gospel. In her book *Written That You May Believe*, Sandra Schneiders points out that in John, “No woman is shown as resisting Jesus’ initiatives, failing to believe, deserting him, or betraying him.” She notes the role of her teacher Raymond Brown and his short 1979 book *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* has played for an increased understanding the role of women in the evangelist’s community. Brown recalled that Jesus’ disciples were surprised—puzzled—to discover Jesus speaking with a Samaritan woman. Yet that

conversation is the most extended theological narrative in the entire gospel. Brown wrote I think of himself, “One is still surprised to see to what extent in the Johannine community women and men were already on an equal level in the fold of the Good Shepherd.”¹

It’s also worth noting that it is in John that Jesus speaks of the relationship not only of every individual to himself—“I am the vine, you are the branches”²—but also of the character relationship among those who believe—“This I command you, to love one another.”³ We believe that the Word made flesh has invited all people to know life, light, and love. Christ enables us to believe in him, to live among each other as brothers and sisters, and as disciples, preparing for the life of the world to come, the who have died and are in the nearer presence of God.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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¹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 198.

² John 15:5.

³ John 15:17.