One

Magdalene and Lazarus

Once there was a brother and a sister. The brother's name was Lazarus and the sister's name was Mary. We don't know much about either of them.

Church Fathers such as Augustine, Jerome, John Chrysostom, and Gregory the Great say the sister of Martha and Lazarus is Mary Magdalene from whom Jesus drove out seven demons. And though scripture does not say explicitly, they argued from the scriptural text that she was a prostitute.

The main thing we know is that they were, both of them together, deeply devoted to Jesus Christ. We know they were His friends. But we also know something about their debt to Jesus. Because we know that Christ rescued both of them. We know that Jesus actually rescued Lazarus from death itself. And we know that Jesus rescued his sister Mary from something much, much worse than death.

Advent is about preparing for the coming of the Savior.

When we meditate on this brother and sister, we come to know exactly why Christ came as Savior, and what that means for us.

Two

Jesus' miracles as signs of His power to heal spiritually

Why was God born at Christmas? Why did He come?

Jesus is God incarnate. That means He is all-powerful. So if He wanted, He could have come to cure all sickness, to end all physical death, all poverty, all military oppression.

Sure, He cured a couple of people with leprosy. But he could have eradicated transmissible disease. He miraculously fed five thousand, He could have miraculously fed five million or five billion. He knocked down the temple guards with a word. He could have toppled every corrupt government in the world with a word. But He didn't. Because He didn't come to save us from these secondary evils. He came to save us from the primary evil, which is our own sinfulness.

And the reason for his miracles over worldly problems was to show his power over spiritual problems.

Just before He heals the lame man, He says, "This is so you may know that the Son of Man has power to forgive sin."

His physical power is the sign of his spiritual power. And that's especially true of the miracles where He brought the dead to life.

Three

The three people Jesus brought back from the dead

There were three people Jesus brought back from the dead before His own resurrection: Jairus' daughter, who had just died. In a sense, she was barely dead. Then the widow's son, where Jesus interrupts the funeral procession and brings the corpse back to life. That guy had been dead longer as they were actually on their way to bury him. But the third person Jesus brought back to life was Lazarus, the brother of Mary Magdalene, and Lazarus had been dead for four days.

Lazarus was so dead that there was a smell from his decomposing.

Now St. Augustine tells us that these three resurrections were performed to illustrate for us the three levels of sin from which Christ can heal us.

Four

The three levels of sin Christ from which Christ can heal us

Jairus's daughter had only been dead a little while. And some sins, we just fall into for a little while. Maybe even just once, momentarily. Well, Jesus can heal us from those sins.

The widow's son had been dead a lot longer. They were taking him to the cemetery. And some sins, we've been doing them a lot longer and they are beginning to have a really lethal effect on our souls. They are taking us to a really bad place. Well, okay, Jesus can save us from those sins too.

But Lazarus was dead, and decomposing. If you had seen his body then, it might have been hard to know what he looked like alive. And some of us have sins that are so deep and have been with us for so long, that we might not even be able to imagine what we look like without them.

Those were the sins of Mary of Magdala. Mary Magdalene. A prostitute, possessed by seven demons. If anyone had ever given up hope of being spiritually healed, it would have been her. But Jesus healed her. He cast out the demons. He gave her back her dignity. He turned her into a saint.

This is the message of Lazarus and his sister Mary, Jesus brought the decomposing corpse back to life, and He brought the twisted, lustful, demonic soul to heroic holiness.

So think what He can do for you.

Five

Christ's Miracles of Healing

In Lazarus and Mary Magdalene, Christ shows us that there is no healing He cannot accomplish.

He will raise our dead bodies back to life on the last day but He offers you spiritual healing now.

So what is your deepest vice? Your deepest resentment, or wound, or addiction?

Can you not stop eating? Do you drink to ease the pain or pressure of reality? Do you suffer from envy or resentment or gossiping? Or looking lustfully at women? Can you just not stop trying to impress other people? Or worrying about your finances? Can you not stop being angry at your kids, or complaining?

These are all sins. These are all forms of spiritual death and corruption. But the good news is, they aren't *you*. You don't have to be that way. Because the Son of Man has the power to forgive sins.

He raised Lazarus from the dead. He cast the demons out of Mary Magdalene. He can make a saint out of you. So don't stop asking Him to do exactly that.

He's waiting for you right now in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He is disguised like a Catholic priest but it's really Christ you will meet there. Go to him. He came to heal you, to drive out your demons. He came to raise you from the dead. Don't you hear him calling… "Lazarus, come out!"