

## Reflection for the Fifth Sunday of Lent

Our gospel today ends with the words, *“many of the Jews, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him.”* Of course, coming to belief is the reason why St John records these stories at such great length. As I have quoted on the last two Sundays, St John ends his gospel by writing that there are many things that I haven't space to record but *“these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.”*

Drawing people into belief is very much at the heart of the Lazarus story. Indeed, it is a thread running throughout the narrative. Firstly, when Jesus receives the news that his friend Lazarus is ill, his apostles beg him not to go to Bethany in Judaea because the last time he was there the Jews tried to stone him and his life is in danger. They played down the seriousness of Lazarus' illness and Jesus has to point out to them, *“Lazarus has died”* and goes on to say, *“and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.”* Then, when Martha hears that Jesus is approaching Bethany, she goes out to meet him and expresses her belief, *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.”* Jesus re-assures her that her *“brother will rise again”* and that *“everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”* He then asks her outright, *“do you believe this?”* and he elicits from Martha a confident statement of faith. *“Yes, Lord”* she says, *“I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”* At the tomb itself, drawing people into belief is once again centre stage when Jesus asks that the stone be rolled back. Martha protests underlining the reality of his death, perhaps indicating that her faith isn't as solid as she suggests, when she says, *“Lord, by this time there will be a smell, for he has been dead for four days.”* Jesus challenges her head-on. *“Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God.”* When the stone is rolled away Jesus *“lifted up his eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me...but I said this on behalf of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.’”* He then called Lazarus out of the tomb.

So, over the last three weeks, drawing people into belief has been at the heart of our gospels. Two Sundays ago, he thirsted for the faith of the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar and the faith of her fellow townspeople and presented himself as *“the water which will become a spring welling up to eternal life.”* Last Sunday, Jesus brought the man born blind out of the darkness and into the light of faith and presented himself as *“the light of the world”* who brings *“the light of life.”* Today, he invites Martha, Mary her sister, and those gathered around the tomb of Lazarus to believe that he is the *“resurrection and the life”* and that *“everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”*

Those same invitations are extended to all of us.