

## Seeds of Hope, Stories for Lent #37 – *We are Like Lazarus*

Today's final seed story for Lent concerns my good friend, Fr. Jim Willig. Once when Fr. Jim was on a three-month sabbatical studying Sacred Scriptures in the Holy Land, he resided in a religious home in Bethany, where Martha, Mary and Lazarus had lived. One day he walked to the site that tradition holds to be the ancient tomb of Lazarus — the very place where Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

The tomb is actually an old cave. Once you enter its small doorway, you climb down approximately 25 steep, slippery, stone steps that lead to a small room where, in ancient times, corpses were placed. I've been there myself on pilgrimages that Fr. Jim and I have led. It is a bit unnerving.

On that day, Fr Jim sat there alone to pray. Suddenly the lights went out without any warning, and the room became pitch dark. Then, from the top of the stairs, he heard the door slam shut and become locked. He was locked inside Lazarus' tomb! He thought, "Oh, God, I am going to die in Lazarus' tomb!" He began to pray, "Please, Jesus, like your friend, Lazarus, get me out of here alive...and preferably not FOUR days from now!"

Finally calming down, he assured himself the doorkeeper must be on a lunch break. In the totally dark and cold cave, he began to identify, in a small way, with Lazarus, recalling that Lazarus comes from Eleazar, meaning "God to the rescue." That seemed fitting. He also recalled that Lazarus lived in Bethany, which means "house of afflictions." Unfortunately, that, too, seemed fitting as he began to fear the possible rats and bats of the cave.

And then he began to realize that there is a little Lazarus in him, and I suppose, that's true for all of us. For, in all of us, there are hidden talents, secrets, dreams, and fears that we don't know how to express. These represent the beautiful and wonderful inner child, buried deep in each of us, waiting to be set free.

Often this child is hidden from our conscious mind, waiting to be given a voice—waiting to teach us how to be free, to be our best self; free to give and to forgive, free to love and be loved, free to pray and play. Jesus comes to us to set that inner part of us free. Jesus calls to us, "Lazarus, come out!" Jesus calls us out of the darkness of our doubt, discouragement, and despair, into the light of faith, hope and love. Jesus calls us out of living in a small world, and into a greater life of love.

Now, as for Fr. Jim being locked in the tomb, you might be interested in knowing what happened next. One hour later, the doorkeeper did indeed return after his lunch break, and unlocked the door. As Fr Jim bolted out of the cave, he stunned the crowd, who thought Lazarus had arisen again! Jesus called in a loud voice: "Lazarus, come out!" And Today if you listen closely, He's calling you and me into a life of greater freedom.

Amen? Amen!

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### *For Further Reflection...*

*What might your inner child or voice be trying to tell you?*

*What can you do to listen better to that inner child?*

*"Jesus called loudly, **Lazarus, come out!** The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips, his face wrapped in a cloth. **Untie him, Jesus told them, And let him go free.**" John 11: 43-44*