



“LORD, IF YOU HAD BEEN HERE”

JOHN 11: 21



Reflection:

September 2024

Lazarus' illness and death were a traumatic experience for Martha and Mary. How earnestly they longed for the presence of Jesus during their trial. "Lord, if you had been here..." Words they must have uttered countless times. They had sent word to Jesus but he had not come. The absence of Jesus, who they knew loved Lazarus dearly, only added to their confusion. Doubts and questions knocked at their hearts. Why hadn't he come or at least sent word? Their faith in Jesus' power was unmistakable. And when he came four days after her brother's death, Martha's words confirmed it. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now, God will give you whatever you ask."

Mary utters the same words when she meets Jesus. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (v. 32) The sight of the sobbing woman at his feet moves Jesus to tears. He understands her pain and cries with her.

If we look back, we would find moments in our lives when we too longed for the presence of Jesus. Perhaps some of us are going through such situations right now. We struggle as we face the trials and tribulations of life. Sometimes they do not make sense and often the pain of the suffering can be intense. The heartrending visuals of the tragedy of war, the sight of a person grappling with cancer or of one's child going through intense trauma, the severe financial strain that makes one wonder how to tide over the week, can all make one wish, "Lord, if you had been here..."

Sometimes, it is the prolonged inability to experience the presence of God that moves one to wish thus. Or it could be the intense loneliness, continuous failures in the face of temptations or the inability to make decisions and move ahead with life that forms this prayer in one's heart. Some of us nurse a deep grudge that if he had been there, the abuse, the accident, would not have happened. And we ask, "Why weren't you there? Why did you abandon me?"

Jesus understands such cries and questions. In fact, he made our prayers his own when he cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Still, he waited for four days to come to Bethany. Why? We can get some insights from his discourse with the disciples.

On hearing about the illness, Jesus said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." (v. 4) He adds, "Lazarus has died, and for your sake, I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe."

His answer gives us two indicators. One is the glory of God and the other is an increase of faith. While the sisters were longing for his presence amid them, Jesus was glad that he was not there. He had stayed back to draw the disciples, Martha and Mary, and the Jews gathered around to the next level of faith. When faced with trials and confusion in life, can we seek God's greater glory and an increase of faith?

Centuries back, Thomas à Kempis wrote in *The Imitation of Christ*:

Many follow Jesus unto the breaking of bread,
but few to the drinking of the cup of his suffering.
Many love Jesus so long as no adversities befall
them.

Many praise and bless him so long as they receive
any consolation from him.

But if Jesus hides Himself, and leaves them but a
little while,

they fall either into complaining, or into too much
dejection of mind.

But they who love Jesus for his own sake,
and not for some special comfort which they
receive,

bless him in all tribulation and anguish of heart,
as well as in the state of highest comfort.

Berly Earnest

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Berly is an animator of the Jesus Youth International Council. He serves as the Director of Ark Motion,

a motion control electronics company. Lives in Kochi, India with his wife Annie and three daughters.

