

The Resurrection of Lazarus feast in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (The day of Lazarus / Lazarus Saturday)

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It's one day before the the great feast of **Palm Sunday** . On this day in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church we do have a reading of the glorious miracle with the raising (resurrecting) of Lazarus, that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ did in front of many Jewish people.

In the gospel readings, we hear that the Lord has went nearby the place where Lazarus has been buried. The Jewish tradition of this time is that their dead be buried in a small cave, while the body is being wrapped up in a specific white clothe matter. This kind of burial ceremony is directly related to most of the ancient Jewish beliefs about the resurrection of the death which will take place.

In that time, Lazarus has been dead (or in grave) for already 4 days, even in the Gospel, we read that the rotting body has started to decay and hence the rotting flesh to smell badlhy ...

The gospel also taught us, Lazarus has been a friend of our Lord Jesus Chirst, and Christ himself loved him. Very interesting fact concerning Lazarus earthly life is also that he has been a brother of the sisters Mary and Martha.

Mary is actually the same Mary which we read about in the Gospel of Luke, the same mary which bows and cries in front of Jesus's feets, repenting and begging the saviour for a forgiveness of her sins.

Even though our Lord has been sent a word 4 days before he came, whether the overall journey to the

place where Lazarus was at that point was only 2 days. The Lord has come on the 4th day to Bethany (a village near Jerusalem)

When the Lord came in Bethany he found that Lazarus is dead and has been in the tomb for 4 days. On his arrival he met Martha and Mary in turn.

Marta was loudly crying regretting that Christ haven't arrived earlier otherwise he would have healed from the sickness and he would not die..

The Lord replied to Marta's lamentation with his majestic words: "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me shall live, even if he dies. And everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die".

As the gospel reading continues, we're told that Christ has been sorrowful in himself and the Lord Jesus further said the famous phrase: "**Jesus wept!**"

In the presence of a crowd of mourners (obviously many people has loved Lazarus), the Lord did his glorious miracle of Lazarus Resurrection.

After on the heavy stone which was sealing the cave with Lazarus dead body was moved away by the order of the Lord.

The Lord entered in the cave prayed and said to Lazarus: "Lazarus come forth!"

Hearing the order of the son of God and our saviour Lazarus has risen up with the funeral clothes still wrapping his body. Jesus instructed some people from the crowd to remove the grave-cloths from Lazarus and let him walk.

As many people in the grave has saw the indescribable miracle the people witnessing the miracle "believed in him".

The meaning of the Lord's "Come forth!" is crucial, as **with the the glorious miracle of Lazarus Raising the Lord has shown his authority over death and live.**

Even the death was submissive to the Lord's order! Even the death couldn't go against his mighty word and silently obeys!

This story was given by our God the Holy Trinity to clearly show us that he is the one in charge over death and over life on earth and hence he is the one in charge of every human being still breathing on this earth.

On the other hand **the raising of Lazarus was done to show to us who still doubt in our hearts and minds and disbelief about the promised Resurrection of the Death in the glorious day of the Lord.**

Our Lord has even wept, clearly showing to us that he is not indifferent to our suffering, but on the contrary is suffering with our pain himself.

After Christ's Crucifixion, death, Resurrection and Ascension, Lazarus has become a vigilant Christ disciple. He has further compelled to seek refuge away from Jerusalem to avoid the anger of high priests and the pharisees, who wanted to kill him.

Lazarus has leaved Judea to seek refuge in another country. He found his refuge in Kittium (today called Larnaca) and situated in Cyprus.

According to Orthodox Church tradtion Lazarus has been ordained to become the first Church bishop of Kitium.

Little is known about Lazarus after Our Lord's Resurrection and Ascension except that during his thirty year he never smiled or joked except for one occasion. One day, he saw someone stealing a clay pot and he laughed saying, "the clay steals the clay".

Another famous tradition connected to Lazarus is the discovery of Mount Athos in 52AD.

Lazarus was very close to the Virgin Mary and he was very grieved that he could not return to Jerusalem to visit her (he was still in fear of the Jews).

The Theotokos learned of his sorrow and sent him a letter to comfort him.

She asked that he might send a ship to her that she might visit him in Cyprus.

With great joy, Lazarus sent a ship to the Holy Lands to bring the Virgin Mary and John, the beloved disciple to Cyprus for a visit.

On their journey, a great storm blew them off course and carried them to the shores of Ephesus and then the ship to the shores of Athos, Greece.

Unaware that divine providence had brought her to this area, the Virgin Mary completely taken by the beauty of the area, prayed to her son that this could be her garden devoted to prayer to "fight the good fight of faith".

Having converted, blessed and established a new christian community from the local idolaters they set sail for Cyprus and met with Lazarus.

The day of Lazarus as we call it in Bulgaria is one of the great Christian feasts in our Orthodox Church, even though it's not among the 12 greatest Christian feasts it's one of the major feats throughout the Church year.

The first tomb of Lazarus in Bethany remains as a site for pilgrims to this very day. The second tomb, on the island of Cyprus, was found in Kittium sometime in A.D. 890, with his relics inside and bearing the inscription "Lazarus, the Friend of Christ."

The commemoration of the day the Lord Jesus has risen Lazarus from the death is one of the few feasts during the great Lent which are considered days of spiritual joy in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and all other national Orthodox Churches around the world.

The feast is also known under the name Lazarus Saturday is always commemorated in Orthodox Churches, one day before the **Palm Sunday** feast.

By the Holy prayers of Lazarus let our Lord Jesus be merciful to us the sinners! Amen.