

**Father Robert Campbell**  
**Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Catholic Community**  
**26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

I didn't meet Lazarus until I was 25 years old. Until then I was simply walking by him at the door and I never saw the dogs licking his wounds. I was raised Catholic, attended mass, received the sacraments and didn't learn about the Church's preferential option for the poor until I attended a Catholic college. I attended a cozy private college with good food and lots of parties...the weekend for us started on Thursday.

But, I learned much about my faith. About Vatican two, about social justice and I decided to join the Peace Corp.

I met Lazarus in 1985 in Sierra Leone West Africa in a remote Kono Tribe village. I lived in a tin roof mud brick hut with no running water or electricity just like my neighbors. They do not turn on a stove to cook or their coffee maker for a cup of coffee. They gather wood and light a fire. Lazarus has no running water and in the dry season he walks to a nearby swamp because the river dries up. He digs a hole and fills a bucket with swamp water. He gives that water to his children because they have to drink something. He is older and he can handle that water, but his children can't they get diarrhea and become dehydrated. Lazarus knows they need hydration and he gives them...more water, the same water that made them sick. Part of my mission was to teach them to boil their water, but if you do not understand germs and never boiled your water before it was a difficult transition, and even when they did boil their water people still get sick.

And there was no emergency room, no hospital or urgent care center, they have no insurance. Every day in the dry season I awoke to the wailing of Lazarus' wife and sisters and daughters wailing over another child lost.

25 % of people live without running water and electricity, they lack basic health care. You don't need to go to Sierra Leone to meet Lazarus. He is here, probably sitting nearby. I attended the Catholic Foundation grant award luncheon on Thursday and learned that New Mexico is last in the nation for child welfare. Here in New Mexico Lazarus is very young, he is a child who is poor, an adolescent abusing alcohol and drugs, whose reading ability is the worst in the nation.

Lazarus is all around us, but we walk out the door and don't even see the dogs licking his wounds. And in the readings this week I feel bad, they are challenging readings. I met Lazarus 30 years ago in Sierra Leone but what have I done for Lazarus lately? Lazarus right here in our neighborhood, in our parish, sitting very close.

I have been doing Rock the Readings on Monday nights with a wonderful group of young adults to pray over these readings, and they were shocked by the strong language in the first reading and the Gospel. Where is the good news? How do you write a homily on this? I said the good news is that God cares, that God is trying to shake us out of our complacency and blindness. And if we only look we can see Lazarus and help him before it is too late for him and for us.

Saint Paul writes,

*But you, [person] of God, pursue righteousness, devotion, love, patience, and gentleness. Compete well for the faith.*

It reads like an oath, a vow, a commitment to the highest ideals of our faith...which includes a preferential option for the poor...a commitment to care. Can you care?

*I charge you before God, who gives life to all things, and before Jesus Christ...to keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Let us not ask that Lazarus dip his finger in water to cool our burning tongues, let us bring cool water to him.

Let us educate ourselves about the issues Lazarus lives with every day, let us vote well, and help with generous gratitude. We have many programs here at Holy Rosary to help Lazarus. We have Saint Vincent de Paul collections where if you have no time or talent you can still contribute.

Let us listen to the call of Moses and the prophets to help Lazarus, because if we do not...neither will we be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.