

The Gospel shows us another very important aspect of Jesus' identity. He is genuinely sad and distressed, both at the death of Lazarus and at the grief of Martha and Mary. John tells us that Jesus loved them. When he sees their grief, he weeps too. This is one of only two mentions of Jesus weeping in the Gospels. As well as being fully divine, Jesus is fully human. If anything, Jesus sees more clearly and feels more keenly the evil of death; and here is death at work among his friends.

Jesus, we might say, is weeping for us also. Lazarus stands for all fallen humanity, subject to death and sin. Jesus' tears are also prayers, as he prepares to offer himself up as our ransom: to save us from those very powers of sin and death.

Application

Perhaps St Augustine best summed up the Christian response to the tears of Christ. He wrote that if Christ wept for us, we ought to weep for ourselves. Jesus wept to teach us to weep. We remember too that in the Beatitudes Jesus said, "Blessed are they who mourn; for they shall be comforted." Perhaps we could learn to weep for our own failings, and also for the way in which sin is still active in the world; but not by weeping in a morbid or self-pitying way. Weeping, by its nature, has a cleansing effect. If we take our failings to the sacrament of reconciliation, we can be spiritually cleansed and strengthened. Our tears will not be in vain. They will be joined to those of Jesus, and will be given a redemptive power.

Lent is a good time for renewing our sorrow for sin. Like Lazarus being loosed from his grave clothes, we are loosed from the bonds of sin. In this way we are united more closely to Jesus, his sacred humanity and divinity, as we draw nearer to the time of joy at Easter.