“Master, the one you love is ill” (John 11:3). As I prepare for Mass this weekend, there are nearly 600,000 confirmed cases of the coronavirus. There are more than 27,000 deaths. And the numbers are growing exponentially. On this 5th Sunday of Lent, death is on our minds, and readily present in all of our readings.

Let us begin with the Gospel about Lazarus. Jesus informs his disciples: “This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Life begins at conception. Our origin is from God, we are mortal and our life on earth is finite, but our souls are not finite. God wants us to live our eternity in his presence through every age for ever and ever. Amen.

I am reminded of the prayer that accompanies the lighting of the Paschal Candle at the Easter Vigil:

Christ yesterday and today,
the beginning and the end,
Alpha and Omega,
all time belongs to him,
and all ages;
to him be glory and power,
through every age and for ever. Amen.

Once we light the large Easter Candle, everyone gets to light a small tapered candle from the Paschal Candle. God is eternal, and he creates us to share in his light for eternity. We are called to live holy lives that we may share in this eternal life in the presence of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit through every age for ever and ever. Amen.

In order to win Olympic Gold, athletes train for years. They are conscious of what they eat, how they sleep, and the daily regimen of exercise necessary to attain excellence. Only one person will win the gold medal in a particular event every 4 years.

The winners circle in heaven is infinitely larger, but the same principle applies. All of our words and deeds should keep our end goal in mind. How we treat others, how we care for those in need, how we love our enemies … all of these are very important. Or in the words of the missionary Stephen Grellet that my father used to quote so often, “I shall pass this way but once; any good that I can do or any kindness I can show to any human being; let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.”

Our time on this earth is limited and what we do now matters for eternity. One way that parents may help their children to keep our goal in mind is to offer a simple prayer with their children at bedtime.

Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
Please, guard me Jesus through the night,
And keep me safe till morning’s light.
But if I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.
And should I live for other days,
I pray that God will guide my ways.

In the Gospel (John 11:37), some said, “Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man Lazarus would not have died?” Later in the Gospel, Jesus will do something not only for Lazarus but for each of us. Jesus suffers death that
we might be free from our sins. How often do you ask God for the forgiveness of your sins?
Formally, we ask God for the forgiveness of sins in the sacrament of Confession but what if you
can’t find a priest.

Last week on the feast of Saint Joseph, Pope Francis offered this advice given that a
priest may be hard to find or that through self-care, we are staying isolated.

“Do what the Catechism (of the Catholic Church) says. It is very clear: If you cannot find
a priest to confess to, speak directly with God, your father, and tell him the truth. Say,
‘Lord, I did this, this, and this. Forgive me,’’ and ask for pardon with all your heart.”
Make an act of contrition and promise God, “‘I will go to confession afterward, but
forgive me now.’ And immediately you will return to a state of grace with God.”

Psalm 130 is a very heartfelt prayer for forgiveness.

Out of the depths I call to you, LORD;
Lord, hear my cry!

May your ears be attentive
to my cry for mercy.
If you, LORD, keep account of sins,
Lord, who can stand?
But with you is forgiveness
and so you are revered.

We often hear Psalm 130 at funerals. We pray trusting in God’s mercy. Just as Martha and Mary
sent word for Jesus to come to the aid of Lazarus, the living come to the aid of the dead praying
for the forgiveness of their sins at a funeral Mass or in our own private prayer.

Jesus wept for Lazarus. We know all too well from our own experiences of grief, that
with death, tears flow quite naturally. But interspersed with the tears are also hope and joy. This
veil of tears is not the end of our existence. Death is not to be feared. Death offers the hope of
life in eternity with God.

Saint Francis of Assisi put it this way in his “Canticle of the Sun” as he cautioned the
sinner to part with his sins and not with the promise of eternal life:
Praised be You,
my Lord through Sister Death,
from whom no-one living can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin!
Blessed are they She finds doing Your Will.”

Reminded of the fragility of life, let us take the time to reconcile with loved ones and
seek healing for old hurts and wounds. It is difficult to let go sometimes. Lazarus is bound head
to foot and unable to do it on his own.

The words flow naturally from Jesus’ lips. “Untie him and let him go” (John11:44).
Meditate on these words from Jesus. Fall asleep with them on your lips. Let Jesus help you to let
go so that you too may came out of the tomb.