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“Go home, your son will live” (John 4:50).

Isa 65:17-21; John 4:43-54

As the daily gospels shift from the synoptics to the fourth Gospel, we move the narrative onto a more theological landscape structured to offer a progressive revelation of who Jesus is. The Gospel is very liturgical, with Jesus’ public ministry occurring over three years with three Passovers in Jerusalem. The core of the Gospel is the “Book of Signs,” a series of miraculous events involving water, wine, light, bread, sheep and life, followed by discourses that reveal Jesus as I AM, the divine name God gave Moses from the burning bush (Exodus 3).

In today’s Gospel, the remote healing of the royal official’s son shows Jesus’ authority to give life to a child who is “at the point of death.” It is an early thematic parallel to the raising of Lazarus, who Jesus learns is also at the point of death but delays in going to him to set up the final sign before his own death and resurrection. It is also a faith story because the royal official trusts in Jesus’ word and goes home to find that the boy recovered at the precise moment Jesus reassured him that “your son will live.”

The best way to read the fourth Gospel is to let the many layers and connections resonate and multiply until they overflow into our own act of faith in Jesus. This way we let go of the need for narrative structure or chronological consistency and let the Gospels be what they are— invitations to surrender our minds and hearts to a personal encounter with Jesus. The plenitude of symbols, prophecies, allusions to other biblical themes and figures is meant to draw our imaginations – the biblical equivalent of the heart — into an intimate experience of I AM, the living God.

This way of reading and praying the scriptures is what the Benedictines call “Lectio Divina,” a reflective engagement of the text as a personal conversation with God. The text is to be savored; the words pondered as Mary is said to have received each word until it became flesh in her. Our Lenten pilgrimage will become richer and richer as we approach Holy Week and the Triduum, culminating in the Easter vigil. In this way we become “imbued” in the Christian Spirit, what the author of the fourth Gospel knew was the purpose of our participation in the Liturgy.

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