



Grand Priory of the Maltese Islands
Military & Hospitaller Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem



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Lazarus of Bethany

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Who was Saint Lazarus?

There is no doubt that Saint Lazarus was a real person. He lived in Bethany with his two sisters Mary and Martha, and may have been related to Simon, a healed leper, who also lived in Bethany. There is also mention of the name Lazarus in one of the parables related by Jesus. All the references to the name Lazarus in the New Testament can be considered a preparation to Christ's death and subsequent resurrection.

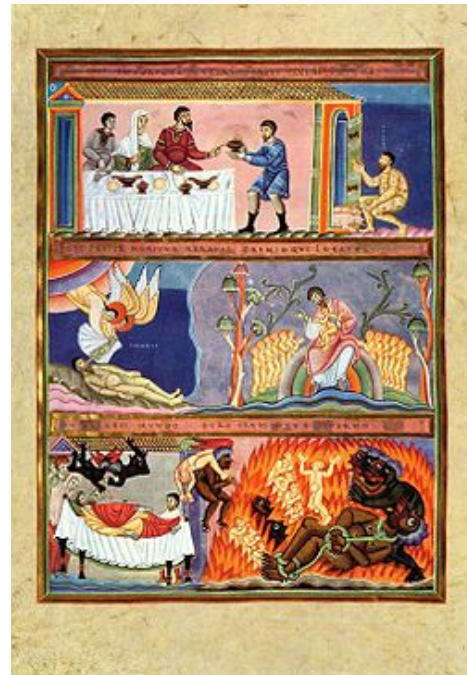
Saint Lazarus the Beggar

[Feast day: 21st June]

The first mention of the name Lazarus [from the Hebrew: **לְעֶזְרָא**, Eleazar - "God (has) helped"] is in the parable of the rich man and the suffering Lazarus covered in skin sores recorded only in the Gospel of Luke [Luke 16:19-31]. The story tells of the relationship between an unnamed rich man and a poor beggar named Lazarus. In the text of the Latin Bible, the *Vulgate*, since the rich man is not named, he is referred to as *Dives* from *dives*, the Latin word for *rich man*.¹ Some Christians view the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man as an actual event which was related by Jesus to his followers; this was generally the view of the medieval Church. According to this view, this story is not a parable but literal biography. Supporters of this view point to the amount of detail in the story. For example, in no other parable does Jesus give a character's name.

Lazarus after his death was preferentially awarded heavenly grace; while the rich man in contrast was condemned to eternal torment in hell. The parable illustrates a theme common

to several of Jesus' other parables: the treatment of the least of society is the true measure of piety. The rich man's claims to external virtue and legal satisfaction could not compensate for his neglect of the poor man – *the sin of omission*. Jesus could very well be purposefully using the name Lazarus to establish a precedent to the subsequent raising from the dead of the true Lazarus of Bethany since the parable ends with a plea from the rich man to God asking for Lazarus to be sent back to help convert the rich man's brothers. If this was Jesus intention, Lazarus of Bethany could well have suffered from a skin disease which because of the apparent relationship to Simon the healed leper of Bethany could have been leprosy.²



Lazarus and Dives

Codex Aureus of Echternach, fol.78r

¹"homo quidam erat dives et induebatur purpura et bysso et epulabatur cotidie splendide" Luke, chapter 16:19. *The Bible - Latin Vulgate*. Vatican.
http://www.vatican.va/archive/bible/nova_vulgata/documents/nova_vulgata_nt_evangelium_lucam_lt.html#16.

²Lazarus and Dives. *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lazarus_and_Dives

Saint Lazarus of Bethany

[Feast day: 17th December]

The second episode is the story of Lazarus' resurrection from the death by Jesus – a definite preparation to Christ's own resurrection. Lazarus of Bethany was reported to have been diseased by a terminal undefined illness. He succumbed to his illness, but was resurrected by Jesus four days after his death with Jesus emphasizing that He was the resurrection [John 11:1-44]. This episode was a definite preparation to Christ's resurrection shortly after. In this episode, Lazarus is referred to as the friend who Jesus loved. "Lord, the one you love is very sick." [John 11:3]. "Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus" [John 11:5].



The Raising of Saint Lazarus
Painting c.1689 by Giuseppe d'Arena



Tomb of Saint Lazarus in Bethany
Actual burial chamber is seen in the lower right

This reference to Lazarus being a loved friend of Jesus has been interpreted by some to suggest that the person referred to subsequently in the fourth gospel by the phrases, the "disciple whom Jesus loved" [John 13:23], the "other disciple," the "other disciple whom Jesus loved," etc. was not Saint John as generally assumed, but Saint Lazarus. Saint John is never referred to as the "disciple whom Jesus loved," directly by himself or by the other evangelists. In his other work, the Book of Revelations, Saint John identifies himself by name. No attempt at anonymity! The question thus arises why should Saint John attempt to remain anonymous in his gospel? Or is it simply that having previously identified the "disciple whom Jesus loved" as Saint Lazarus, he felt no need to continue identifying him in the subsequent texts of his gospel.³

Jesus was apparently a frequent visitor at Lazarus' home. An earlier episode describes how Jesus and his disciples were welcomed by Lazarus' sisters – Martha and Mary [Luke 10:38-42].



Jesus with Lazarus' sisters
Painting c.1654 by Johannes Vermeer

The next episode where Saint Lazarus is specifically mentioned relates to his attendance to a banquet for Jesus in Bethany hosted by the healed leper named Simon six days before the feast of the Passover [Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-11]. During this banquet Lazarus sister Mary [John 11:2] reportedly a sinner washed and anointed Jesus'

³ www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/disciple-jesus-loved-lazarus-faq.htm

feet. Admonishing those who believed the use of the ointment was an unnecessary expense; Jesus made reference to the need for anointing His body in preparation for burial – a definite reference to His forthcoming death within the subsequent week.



Mary anointing Jesus
Painting c.1618 by Paul Peter Rubens

The presence of the resurrected Lazarus at this banquet had attracted a significant following for Jesus, and the Jewish priesthood sought to have Lazarus killed [John 12:9-11].

The supper at Simon's house is the last time that Lazarus is depicted in the gospels (John 12:1-2). The anonymous one "*whom Jesus loved*", generally assumed to be Saint John, is seen for the first time in the following chapter (John 13:23), sitting at a table with Jesus, and he remains prominent in the life of Jesus through the end of this gospel. The actions of the disciple "*whom Jesus loved*" during and in the aftermath of the crucifixion certainly fit what we know about Saint Lazarus. The "*other disciple whom Jesus loved*" accompanied Jesus to the "*the palace of the high priest*" (John 18:15-17) and subsequently was charged by Jesus on the cross to care for Jesus' mother (John 19:27-29) who he takes into his household.

The "*disciple whom Jesus loved*" certainly exhibited a courage quite unlike that of the other chosen disciples who acted out of fear of death. Saint Lazarus, having been recently resurrected from the dead, would be expected to behave differently. This disciple also features on the morning of the resurrection when he and Peter ran to the tomb of Jesus. It is stated that when he saw the "*linen clothes*" inside, he believed—a statement not made about Peter at this stage (John 20:3-8).

Another biblical extract that may point to Lazarus being the "*disciple whom Jesus loved*" is the statement made by Jesus to Peter about him— "*If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?*" (John 21:23) This statement was erroneously interpreted by the community of believers that the "*disciple Jesus loved*" would not die—why would they think that of Saint John, it is more reasonable to believe this of the resurrected Saint Lazarus.

There is no further documentation that relates specifically to Saint Lazarus after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Lazarus' subsequent history is based on tradition. Lazarus certainly would have been a *persona non grata* in Israel after the resurrection of Jesus and may have been one of the many Christians of Judea "*which were scattered abroad as far as Phoenicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch...*" [Acts 11:19].

In the Orthodox tradition, Lazarus and his sisters – Mary and Martha – were set adrift in a leaking boat by the Jews at Jaffa. They made a safe landfall at Cyprus.⁴

According to tradition he was ordained first Bishop of Kition, modern Larnaka, by the Apostle Paul [Saul] or Barnabas during first missionary visit c.41 AD accompanied by Barnabas and John Mark. The *Acts of the Apostles* however fail to make mention of the ordination of Lazarus in Cyprus. According to the *Acts*, the missionaries arrived at Salamis and traveled all across Cyprus to Paphos preaching the word of God in the synagogues. Following an triumphant encounter with a magician named Bar-Jesus, Paul was able to convert the governor of Cyprus—Sergius Paulus [Acts 13:4-12].

Lazarus lived in Cyprus for about thirty years, dying at the age of sixty. According to Cypriot traditions, he was buried in a sarcophagus housed in the Byzantine Church of St Lazarus at Kition with an inscription "*The four-day Lazarus, friend of Christ*". In 890 AD the emperor of Byzantium Leon VI Sophos transferred the remains of Lazarus to Constantinople, in return for which he embellished the church at Kition dedicated to St Lazarus. The church survives to this date.

⁴ D. Serfes. *St. Lazarus The Friend Of Christ And First Bishop Of Kition, Cyprus*.
<http://www.serfes.org/lives/stlazarus.htm>

The Emperor also built a second church dedicated to Saint Lazarus at Constantinople.



The Church & tomb of Saint Lazarus
Larnaca, Cyprus

A reliquary consisting of the right foot of St Lazarus was acquired by the Order of Saint John. This was brought with them from Rhodes to Malta and eventually deposited in their Conventual Church of St John the Baptist at Valletta.⁵ On the 2nd November 1972, during renovation works on the Larnaca church, part of the sacred relics of St Lazarus were discovered in a marble sarcophagus under the altar.



Skull Remains of Saint Lazarus
Church of Saint Lazarus, Cyprus

Arethas—Bishop of Caesarea—immortalized the event by two speeches. In the first speech, he praised the arrival of the sacred relics from Kition to Constantinople; in the second speech, he described in detail the procession which followed the transfer of the relics from Chrysoupolis in western Turkey to the great cathedral of St Sophia.

The saint's remains remained in Constantinople until the capture of that city by the Crusaders in 1204, when the Saint's holy relics were carried to Marseilles. These eventually disappeared without trace.



Old reliquary with relic from St Lazarus

While the Orthodox Eastern tradition holds that Lazarus of Bethany escaped with his family to Cyprus where he was ordained Bishop. The Western tradition however holds that Lazarus, together with other disciples, was put out to sea by the Jews hostile to Christianity in a vessel without sails, oars, or helm, and after a miraculous voyage landed in Provence at a place called today the Saintes-Maries. Lazarus subsequently went to Marseilles, and, having converted a number of its inhabitants to Christianity, became their first pastor. During the first persecution under Nero he hid himself in a crypt, over which the celebrated Abbey of Saint Victor was constructed in the fifth century. In this same crypt he was interred, when he shed his blood for the faith. During the new persecution of Domitian he was cast into prison and beheaded in a spot which is believed to be identical with a cave beneath the prison Saint-Lazare. His body was later translated to Autun, and buried in the cathedral of that town. But the inhabitants of Marseilles claim to be in

⁵ A. Ferris. *Descrizione storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo*. A. Ferris, Malta, 1866, p.140

possession of his skull which they still venerate.⁶



Abbey of Saint Victor
Marseille, France

Like the other legends concerning the saints of the Palestinian group, the western tradition, which was believed for several centuries and which still finds some advocates, has no solid foundation. The eastern tradition is more plausible. Before the middle of the eleventh century there does not seem to be the slightest trace of the western tradition. The most ancient Provençal text alluding to the episcopacy of Saint Lazarus is a passage in the "*Otia imperialia*" of Gervase of Tillbury (1212).

In the crypt of Saint-Victor at Marseilles an epitaph of the fifth century has been discovered, which informs us that a bishop named Lazarus was buried there. In the opinion of the most competent archæologists, however, this personage is Lazarus, Bishop of Aix, who was consecrated at Marseilles about 407, and who, having had to abandon his see

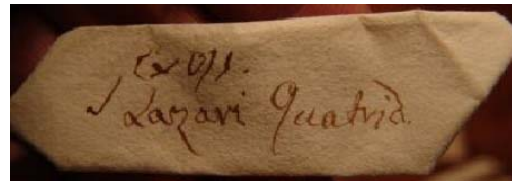
⁶ L. Clugnet (1910). St. Lazarus of Bethany. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Co. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09097a.htm>

in 411, passed some time in Palestine, whence he returned to end his days in Marseilles.⁷



Crypt with fresco
Abbey of Saint Victor

Another contemporary bishop c.439 named Lazarus was the Archbishop of Milan during a time when invading Ostrogoths controlled the area. He may have developed and certainly popularized the Rogationtide litanies, originally devised to ask for protection from the Ostrogoths, but over time the devotion spread throughout Europe. He died on the 14th March 450 and was canonized in the pre-Congregation period. His feast day was moved to the 11th February to avoid clashes with Lent.⁸



Relic of Saint Lazarus of Milan

⁷ L. Clugnet (1910). St. Lazarus of Bethany. *op. cit.*

⁸ K.I. Rabenstein. *St. Patrick Catholic Church Saint of the Day*. <http://www.saintpatrickdc.org/ss/0211.shtml>