Phoenix Envy

Resurrection ain't what it used to be

March 1, 1998 By Peter Kurth

Greetings, fellow walking miracles! In my last column, I provided some background information about Lazarus, the Biblical character whom Jesus raised from the dead in 33 AD. I've been "resurrected" on protease inhibitors for more than a year now, and the world seems to only get stranger the longer I'm around. I've been reading more about Lazarus' story to find out how *he* coped, but apart from a few folk myths, some obscure literary references, a poem by Sylvia Plath and a Eugene O'Neill play called *Lazarus Laughed* (and why wouldn't he?), there's not a lot to go on.

The Bible makes clear an important distinction between Lazarus and me: When he was raised from the grave, he was cured of whatever it was that had killed him. That is, Lazarus was completely free of disease. We know this because not long after his resurrection he was invited to dinner with Jesus and the rest of the faithful -- an invitation that, under Jewish law, wouldn't have been extended if Lazarus was thought to be "unclean" in any way.

By contrast, I went to dinner with some friends the other night and had to bring a pillbox, a timer, a couple of Marinol, a bottle of grapefruit juice (to boost the saquinavir), prescription Imodium and an extra pair of clean undershorts. I doubt that Lazarus needed as many loincloths as I do jockey shorts. It's been six months since I've allowed myself to be more than 20 feet from the john. In fact, I propose we start a real smear campaign: When ACT UP does another demo against the drug companies, let's skip the buckets of fake blood and instead toss our dirty laundry on their doorsteps.

Some other things I'll bet Lazarus never had to deal with:

Keeping a positive attitude. Since Lazarus was plainly alive and well upon rising from the dead, he could afford to have any attitude he chose: Grateful, bewildered, angry, hysterical, stupefied, casual, irreverent -- you name it. Either way, he was out of the woods. I, on the other hand, am told by everyone from Elizabeth Taylor to the corner gas-station attendant that I must have a positive attitude, live each day as it comes and remember that if I slip into "negativity" for a single moment, dire consequences will follow.

Well, I don't buy it. Mortal illness is *not* a reflection of your character. I've seen men and women who were angels in life depart this world kicking and screaming, and I've seen odious people with

horrible politics go out like Little Nell. I myself was supposed to have been dead a long time ago, and now look at me, dashing off columns in the full flush of middle age. I'd revise the "Keep a positive attitude" advice to "Keep all the attitude you've got. You'll need it."

Support-group facilitators. According to the New Testament, Jesus raised only one other person from the dead besides Lazarus -- a child somewhere in Galilee. Since that's not quite enough people to form a support group, Lazarus was spared a swarm of eager Galileans armed with MSWs and ready to misinterpret his emotions, challenge his conclusions and limit him to "I" statements.

Political correctness. There was only one correct point of view in Lazarus's time: The rule of the Roman Empire. Anything that ran counter to that counted as sedition and got your ass strung up on a cross. Nowadays, though, especially in the world of AIDS, you can't open your mouth without offending some "underrepresented" special interest: For all I know, you can get yourself stoned to death by Native-American chubby-chasers simply for muttering, "Oh, to hell with it -- cut to the chase!" at a Ryan White Title II meeting. I can't help feeling it must have been easier to deal with the Roman legions than, say, a troop of ACT UP lesbians who persist in interpreting every casual statement as a political affront. (I'm changing the locks on my door as I write this.)

False hope. We can safely assume that once you've been raised from the dead by the Son of God, your troubles are over. I mean, you can't develop cross-resistance to the Holy Ghost. But those of us in a lower, less perfect state of resurrection still need to worry about the twists and turns of fate, the wiliness of the virus, the intransigence of the medical establishment and the vindictive whims of Congress.

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