

## Tenth Sunday of the Year June 05, 2016

1 Kings 17:17-24; Galatians 1:11-19; Luke 7:11-17

Many of us worry quite a bit about the state of our world. Wickedness and godlessness seem to have the upper hand all around us and God seems not to care or so many of us may think. But God is always in charge. He has his reasons for permitting lawlessness in this world. He is able end these evils when the opportune moment arrives and is able to bring good out of these evils. When he gave his prophetic mission to Elijah, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was at its lowest depths of religious knowledge and practice. Elijah put an end to this sad state of affairs by his victory over the prophets of the false god Baal, on Mount Carmel. The power and glory of the one true God was once more recognised. The same is true in the lives of individuals. There are those who are loyal to God, exemplary Christians, charitable to their neighbours and an example to all. Yet God allows sickness and sadness to haunt them and their families as read in the Gospel of today. The only son of the widow of Naim was dead. But God had a purpose and he brings glory to his great works and shows how he supports those helpless in the world. God intends to strengthen our faith and build us up in this difficult world of ours and invites us to glorify him.

The first and third readings of the day have a lot in common. Widow, deceased son, resurrection, and astonishment on divine presence! Widow means to be helpless. Live without Partner. An important part of their life is no longer there. This makes their life difficult. It is like a bird that must fly with one wing. God's power is made evident firstly in the resurrection of the son of the widow of Zarephath thanks to Elijah's intervention, but even more so in the resurrection of the son of the widow of Nain through Christ's work. Elijah was one of the first of the prophets was sent to the Kingdom of Israel to keep their faith alive. To escape a certain death at the hands of Ahab the King, Elijah and during the drought, he was staying at the home of Sidonian widow. He becomes the instrument of the working of God's power. Divine power is manifested in a special way through the instrumentality of spiritual persons. God hears the prayer of Elijah and shows his kindness towards the widow bringing her son back to life. We learn from all of this that God's power, revealed above all in Jesus Christ, is made present in history for the good of mankind. Biblical world is much better and social in this regard: There are numerous portions in the Bible; those assure care and protection for widows and orphans and warn to avoid taking advantage of their weakness. The Book of Exodus tells us that no one shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for they themselves were aliens in the land of Egypt. They shall not abuse any widow or orphan. God promises them that he will hear their cry.

The context of the second reading is that the Galatians whom Paul had converted to Christianity, were being persuaded by the Judaizers, namely the converted Jews that Paul had not taught them the full truths of the faith. Paul had always insisted that he taught them the full knowledge of Christ and no one not even the angels from heaven had the right to change it. Now he strongly defends his own authority to preach the Gospel and the truths of his doctrine. The Judaizers were saying that Paul had appointed himself an apostle and that he did not have the true Gospel. This he now

solemnly denies and insists that what he taught the Galatians was not invented by him or any other ordinary man. Paul insists that he had his call to the Apostolate by Christ himself, just as the others had. Therefore he was a true Apostle. The essence of the Christian Gospel was given to him at his conversion, namely that Christ the Son of God who had become man for their salvation. Even though he had challenged the church having filled with the knowledge of the Mosaic Law, it is God himself has called him to a conversion and has made him the Apostle of the gentiles.

The simple story in today's Gospel is only one of three narratives in the Gospel where Jesus is described as the divine person bringing a dead person back to life. The most dramatic is the story of Lazarus told in John's gospel. There is also the story of the synagogue leader's daughter who had actually died and Jesus brings her back to life and gives her back to her parents. This was indeed a sad situation. In the thinking of the time, today's scene is particularly sad. A woman, who has already lost her husband, has now lost her only son and the only means of her support. The lot of the widow, often a relatively young woman, was particularly difficult in a society where the married woman was no longer the responsibility of her own family and who, after the death of husband and children, was of no further interest to her in-laws either. She simply had nowhere to look for support. She was largely left to her own devices in a society where social welfare was unknown. It is no wonder that widows were often quoted, with orphans – children without a family, as the most to be pitied in society. Jesus himself is deeply moved at her plight. Significantly at this point and for the first time in his Gospel, Luke refers to Jesus as "Lord", a title reserved for God alone. He approaches the litter carrying the dead man, tells the bearers to stop and then simply orders the young man to rise up. As in other similar stories, the word "rise up" is the same as that used to describe the resurrection of Jesus. "I have come that they may have life."

The Gospel narrative is all about compassion and Luke gives us the description of a sad story with a large crowd assembled at the funeral procession. The procession contained not only relatives and friends engaged in the merciful work of burying the dead, but also hired musicians and mourners whose flutes and cymbals and loud shouting that created a sad atmosphere. Luke's description of the only son symbolises the expression of the world's broken hearts. For the widow this was a difficult situation and her last hope in life is going to be buried in a cave. She is present now at the burial procession as she is willing to even exchange places with him. Surrounded by friends though she is, yet she is alone with no one to care for her. Luke gives a beautiful picture of compassionate Jesus who is so human. Jesus the rabbi far from being aloof and distant from people is one with the crowds as he was at the wedding feast of Cana. He is now overwhelmed with pity and is moved by the depth of tragedy. Luke adds to the compassion of Jesus his power. For the first time he calls him "Lord", the messianic title and he is the only evangelist to use it before the resurrection. Jesus touches the coffin and the dead man is brought to life. The young man now sits up to the surprise of every one. He has to be unbound in order to make him walk as before. Jesus gave him back to his mother as a new gift coming from the compassionate Lord.

The reaction of the people around is one of awe and admiration. "A great prophet has risen among us and God has visited his people." They had no doubts about the origin of what they had seen taking place; it was the work of God. Not surprisingly, the story spread like wildfire all through Judea and beyond. Jesus directly commands the dead man to rise so as to continue living and helping his mother. In the very person of Jesus, God's power is revealed in a marvellous and impressive way. In the case of Elijah, as we heard in the first reading, divine power was put into action to show that the Lord is the only lord of life. For Jesus, this is not what matters, but rather his compassion for the widow who was left alone, without her son's help: "He was moved with pity for her and said to her, 'Do not weep.'" Elijah withdraws to a room and performs a sort of rite to make him come back to life. Jesus raises the son of the widow of Nain before the whole entourage that accompanied the dead man, with no other gesture than his powerful and imperative word: "Young man, arise!" Truly, Jesus is the "incarnation", the visible and tangible presence of God's power among men.

In calling Jesus a prophet, the people were perhaps thinking of another great prophet, Elijah, who also gave a son back to a grieving widow. This is the widow of Zarephath, mentioned by Jesus in his confrontation with the people of his hometown. God had told Elijah to go and live in her house. She was a desperately poor woman who, when Elijah first met her, was gathering sticks to light a fire so that she could cook a final last meal for her son and she before they both died of poverty and starvation. Elijah solved that problem by providing an unending supply of basic food for all three of them. But now, the son has fallen ill and "his illness was so severe that in the end he had no breath left in him". The mother, now – like the widow in today's Gospel – about to lose her only hope in life, is distraught and takes it out on Elijah. She sees him as a man of God bringing punishment on her former sins. But Elijah takes the son, carries him upstairs and stretches himself three times on the boy's body while praying to God to restore life to the boy. In acting like this, it would seem that this was a symbolic transfer of some of his own bodily warmth to the boy but it is clear that life would come through prayer. The prayer was answered and the boy is given back to a grateful mother. She now sees Elijah truly as a man of God bringing life to his people.

This story should help us to look at our own situation and see, first of all, how alive we really are. Fr Tony de Mello used to like saying that most of us are dead or asleep. We do not live in the real world of the now. We are nostalgically looking at the past or we are dreaming about a future that never comes. In the meantime, the real world just passes us by. Another popular Catholic writer, John Powell, sometimes reminds us that most of us only use a tiny fraction of our real potential. We are only partly alive. So he wrote a book called "Fully Human, Fully Alive". We have probably all heard the words of St Irenaeus often quoted: "The glory of God is a person fully alive." Perhaps today we should reflect a little on just how fully we are living our lives. It is not enough just to be physically alive. There are other levels: the emotional, social, intellectual, moral and spiritual levels. At the same time we are surrounded by lots of people who are barely alive in the real sense. Maybe we can do something to lift them up and give them new life or improve the quality of their living. Jesus promised to give us life, life in great abundance. It is there for the asking.

A powerful God, present among us. God's power continues to show itself in the world and the history of our time. Still, it's necessary to have the clear gaze of faith to easily and clearly discover it. His power continues to be active in the physical miracles performed through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, not only in Lourdes but also in so many other sanctuaries spread throughout the world. As well, it is shown in the physical miracles performed through the intercession of the saints. Moreover, and above all, there are the "spiritual miracles" that God's power does in so many persons: conversion, the radical change of life, the continued action in souls to purify, elevate and transform them, uniting them more to Him. Only in heaven will we be able to know in all its amplitude the daily marvels God's power works in souls. God wants to show us his power. God is superabundant and most generous in his love, wisdom and greatness; so too is he in his power. God, in his goodness, has looked upon us to show us his power. He shows it to us through his presence in the sacraments, particularly in Eucharist and Reconciliation or Penance. As well, through the actual graces he grants us daily: we do recognize some of them easily, others we hardly notice, but God's power is made present through them. God manifests his power in us, and for every person, but especially for a Christian, it is thus important to discover God's power acting daily in your own life.

The lesson we have to learn from this story today is the real, sincere compassion Christ had for human sufferings of men in this life. He became man in order to bring human kind into eternal life. During his earthly life he showed concern to all and was always found when there were the difficulties and hardships. In this Gospel story Jesus is found when the only son of a widow is dead and is taken for the burial. The woman did not ask for a miracle; but Jesus was there when he is needed the most. She did not have to ask because Jesus clearly saw her grieved heart and answered her unspoken wish. His was the most compassionate of human hearts. His motive was to save people and tells us how compassionate we ought to be and how we can reduce the sufferings and pains in others. We see his divine mercies every day of our life. We ask him for his divine compassion on those in need and we are his instruments of bringing it into the world. There are also those who see in God's power a rival to man's power, thinking that slowly man's power, thanks to the progress in science and technology, will gradually occupy the spaces in which people of yesteryear felt God's power most acutely. The authentic position of a Christian is to accept God's power and presence among us cooperate with it in bettering one's life and contributing time and energy such that God's power is accepted by others, changing more and more the mentality of people and human society.

A movie star visiting a refugee camp in Bangladesh for publicity was repelled by the sight of the camp itself, dirty clothes and children without having proper bath. On the first morning he washed his hands a dozen times and did not want to touch anything and least of all the people all seemed to be covered with sores. Then he was bending down near a little ugly looking child mainly for the sake of photo, someone accidentally stood on the child's fingers. The child screamed and in a reflex, the movie star, forgetting the child's dirt and sores, grabbed him. He always remembered the warm body clinging to him and the crying stopped instantly. This was the great moment he

learnt loving and he kept this photograph of this child prominently displayed in his house and never again hesitated to grab the opportunity of expressing love to others.

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