

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost (9/13/2020)

Jesus enters into a difficult scene as he enters the city of Naim. It is a scene of tragedy. Who cannot have their heart wrenched at the sight of a parent burying their child. I watched a movie many years ago in which a mother was burying her child, the writers so aptly placed in the mouth of that mother: "It's not supposed to be this way, I was supposed to go first." This event so out of the normal order of things cannot help but move the heart - as it did move the heart of Our Lord. Add to this that the woman is a widow - meaning that without a husband or son to support her, she will be destitute. A scene of such human tragedy that Jesus does not let pass.

He approaches and raises the young man to life. He restores the mother's joy, he soothes the intense pain she was feeling, he calms the fears she must have had for the future. In this event we can see a model for our own life and resurrection, we can see that Jesus - in this human act, moved as he was with mercy - is also sending a powerful message about who he is and what he can do. As with so many things that God does, there are multiple levels of meaning. On one level we are given an example of mercy, we are showed that we must be as He was, and do what we can do for others who are in pain. We do not possess the power over life and death that he does, but we can certainly use the gifts that the Lord has given us in order to bring others solace in their dark times.

On another level, we can see in this scene a model of community. Notice that this burden of the woman was being born by others. There is a sense of community in the way that she is not left alone in this time, but there is a communal response. Although these individuals are likely not all family - in this time they act as family ought to act. This is an important model for the Christian community as we are called by the Lord to be as brothers and sisters to one another. To realize the familial bonds that we have in Christ through our Baptism, to look to our one Father in heaven and act truly with the love of family members. In the Epistle St. Paul instructs the Galatians to: *Bear ye one another's burdens* - and this story given us a concrete and easily seen example of a community assisting a member in carrying a burden that is altogether too heavy for her to bear on her own. The unity of the community is modeled on the ideal of unity in the family - however, there are sometimes difficulties in living out that unity in our own families. The powerful example in their scene can also perhaps serve as a call to families that have been

estranged, or in which there are angers and resentments. A call to reach to the core of what unites them and rekindle that love that is somewhere at the root of that family.

Moreover, the scene points to the person of Jesus. Note two things: (1) The pain and suffering present continued until they reached Jesus. No matter the loving support that was shown, the grief remained until they reached Jesus. In fact, the only solution to this grief was in encountering Jesus. In his solution to our pain and grief he may not perform a miracle such as he did that day, but we can be assured that when we carry that burden to Jesus - he will provide a means to comfort. This means may be a miraculous change of situation, it may be a realization in us of the need to reorganize life in some way, it may be the reception through the Holy Spirit of an ability to make a radical acceptance of the situation. Jesus does not let those who come to him carrying a crushing burden to pass without intervention. (2) The Second thing is that Jesus points to his power to bestow life after death. We know that first himself will rise and then all those who are united to his Body. The worst things that we fear, the one thing that seems like the worst calamity is rendered insignificant when one arises from the sleep of death and beholds the face of Jesus, as this young man did. Our Lord gives here further proof for what he will say elsewhere: *I am the resurrection and the life.*

The people of Naim realized that something powerful and amazing had happened. They interestingly state that *God hath visited his people.* They had no idea how right they were to say that. The man before them was no mere man. He is the I AM who is the resurrection and the life, he is EMANUEL and in a very literal way "God among us," He is the eternal hope of all the hopeless. He who created the universe, He who established humanity and made covenants with it, He who saved His people and who once compassionately and individually soothed the pain of an unnamed widow - that Lord and God will become present to us during this sacrifice. Our burden he carried on the cross, and He lends His power and strength to us as we bear our own and one another's burdens. Let us greet him today with the same awe and reverence that once gripped the people of Naim - Let us be grateful today, and for all our lives, that God hath visited his people.