



3RD SUNDAY OF LUKE

October 9

THE GOSPEL READING

Luke 7:11-16

[A Widow's Son is Raised]

At that time, Jesus went to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." And he came and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"

THE SERMON

The Lord Jesus begins His ministry by traveling around the area where He had grown up, ministering to the people who lived close to Him. He travels throughout the region of northern Israel, and many accounts mention the Sea of Galilee, as well as cities like Capernaum and Nazareth. In this passage, Jesus is walking not far from where He had grown up and came to the town of Nain.

As the Lord approaches the gates of the small town, there is a funeral procession and a commotion. Family and friends are helping a mother and carrying her dead son's casket (more accurately known as a bier). The situation is one of great sadness, and provides many parallels to Christ's work and its implications for *our* lives.



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The mother has lost her *only son* (in Greek, μονογενής) and is also a widow. This means that having lost her husband and only son, she was left destitute because, in that society, the husbands provided for the family. And if the husband died, the sons would take on such responsibility. So at the same time, the widow (who remains nameless) contemplates her losses and wonders about her own life and future. The widow has a sense of devastation, perhaps loneliness and fear for the future. In a real sense, she is carrying her own sentence of death.

Jesus, however, sees her and comes to her. He has compassion for her. The Greek word used for compassion in the original Gospel reading (the verb σπλαγχνίζομαι) carries a strong meaning of being deeply moved in one's inward parts. It means having a deep, heartfelt sense of sharing another's pain and a readiness to come to their aid. We are told of Jesus' compassion several times in the Gospel, like when He feeds the multitudes and heals lepers and blind men.

Our Lord is gracious and compassionate, and is deeply moved when He comes to the widow who has lost her only son. He wipes the tears from her eyes, saying, "Do not weep." This scene, in many ways, prefigures the situation in which Jesus will find Himself in, not too long after this. He, the only Son of God, would be crucified. By His Cross, His Mother, Mary the Theotokos, is also left without a husband nor her only Son. Her tears were shared by the Apostle John and others who stood with them at His Holy Cross. In the service of Lamentations on Holy Friday (evening), we chant, "Tearful lamentations did the pure Lady pour over You, O sweetest Jesus, maternally crying out, 'How can I bury You, my Son?'"

Mary the Theotokos was weeping as Jesus Himself would weep at the death of His friend, Lazarus, as Jesus shared in the sorrowful condition of humanity, with pain and loss. And yet, death does not have the last word because He has destroyed death — and so, He comforts the widow by raising her son. The Word of God raises the young man when Jesus Christ says, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" What is more powerful than the Word of God? He needs only to speak to exert His Will.

The widow's son, in his casket, sits up and begins to speak. Jesus then gives him back to his mother. The Lord, Who is the source of life, defeats death. As Saint Cyril of Alexandria says, "He performs the miracle not only in word, but also touches the bier (a type of casket), to the end that you might know that the sacred body of Christ is powerful to the saving of man. . . For as iron applied to fire does the work of fire, so the flesh, when it is united to the Word, which quickens all things, becomes itself also quickening, and the banisher of death."

Remarkably, Jesus does not ask (as He sometimes does with other people) if the mother has faith, nor if she wants Him to resurrect her son. He knows not only the feelings but also the disposition of her heart. He gives her back what is needed for her earthly life (a son to provide for her) and her salvation. With this miracle, He cures her soul's despair,

strengthens her faith, and leads her to salvation. We can all experience miracles of deliverance in our lives when we experience God's compassionate help and His Divine plan for our salvation.

Jesus is, in a real sense, saying, "Woman behold your son; and, young man, behold your mother," just as He did at the Cross. The son's life is restored. The mother's life is restored. He also restores *our* lives when things seem hopeless and we feel alone. This story is an example and proof of the two natures of Christ — human and Divine. The man Jesus has compassion for the mother. The Son of God has mercy on us.

Jesus, Who calls light out of darkness, creates all things and makes all things new again, is also the only Son who died and rose to restore life. And yet, at the same time, we are the ones who, without Christ, are dead in trespasses and sins but are raised with Him in new life. Even though we separate ourselves from God when we betray Him with our sins, God is waiting for us so that He may raise us from the deadliness of sin. God does not shy away from us when we shy away from Him. He will take us by the hand and restore us to health and salvation.

Right before Jesus died on the Cross, He gave John the Disciple to Mary to be her son in His place. By giving her John, the Lord ensured that His Mother would be protected in a society hostile to sonless widows. The same Lord Who protected His Mother at His own Crucifixion by ordaining her as the Mother of the Apostles, is now raising the only son of the Widow of Nain. He does this so that the Widow of Nain might also be protected and honored, just as He did with His own Mother at the Crucifixion. The Lord has raised the son of the widow so that He may continue to protect her in this life, and He will raise him again for everlasting life at the Second Coming. The Lord comes to us at our lowest point, and raises us into His loving embrace, even when we have distanced ourselves from Him.

Jesus destroys the death of humanity, and He restores true life in our own lives. Christ renews because He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is our Creator, but He also has compassion for us. Through His love, we are called to be compassionate to one another. And, with deep faith, pray for the salvation of every human being.

God, Who in the beginning created, also recreates; He renews us even in the darkest hours of our life. Christ, who died and rose from the dead, also gives us life in our despair through the sacramental life of the Church. God cleanses us through baptism. He gives us His own Holy Spirit at chrismation. We become one with Him at communion. We are reconciled with Him when we confess. And He heals us of our physical and spiritual infirmities with unction. His compassion for us is limitless, and because of His love, He is ready to meet in our darkest hours and, through His love, restore us. He is the Life and the Life-giver by nature. In every circumstance, Jesus sees us and comes to us, as He does to the widow, to wipe our tears and restore our lives.