

THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Text: St. Luke 7:11-17

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

If anyone wonders what it means to be reconciled to our FATHER in Heaven, then one need search no further than our Gospel text for today. Here, today, we have been made witness to what shall be on that great and final Day when the LORD JESUS will return on the clouds of heaven to restore and renew all things, and thus, reconciling God's children and all of creation to our merciful and compassionate Father. With this text, we are shown the love of God who has set you, and all believers, free from sin, Satan, eternal punishment, and death. With this text, you are provided a glimpse into the very heart and nature of God, who is love, and whose love for you surpasses all human understanding.

Still, there are those who refuse to believe; those who reject JESUS and His FATHER; those who say, *"Where is your God? If He really exists, and if He truly loves His creation, then why do His children suffer and die? Why does the world still suffer war, famine, disease, and the deadly effects of nature in storms, fire, and earthquakes? If your God truly loves you then why does He not save you? I cannot believe in a God who allows such terrible things and continues to allow His children to suffer."*

But friends, my guess is that they who ask and declare such things, mocking our faith and our God, are really asking, *"Why has God not saved me? Why does God continue to allow me to suffer?"*

What such unbelievers fail to understand about the faith of a Christian, is that the faith and prayers of a Christian are not so much for the purpose of escape from suffering, but for the courage, the strength, the faith, to persevere when the trials and sufferings of this life come our way. What they fail to understand is that a Christian looks to that peace which only our LORD JESUS can provide—a peace that is found in Christ not only in good times but even, and perhaps most especially, in times of trial and suffering as well. Christians trust in the LORD and His promises for He is good, abounding in mercy and steadfast love. Indeed, He is our very present Help in times of trouble and is always ready to hear those who call upon Him.

We Christians call God, *"Our FATHER,"* and so He is, but He is not like our earthly fathers who love us but often can, and do, fail. Rather, earthly fathers are so called because they are to be a reflection of He who is the Source of all comfort, who is the Giver of all good things, and the greatest gift He has provided for us is life in His SON, JESUS CHRIST.

In JESUS, God has come to live with His people, to feel what we feel, to experience what we experience, to live as we live, even to die as we die. Therefore, God is not unaware of your pain or your suffering. He is not unaware of your fears and the temptations that haunt and taunt

each of you. Though without sin, JESUS, who is both God and man, knows what it means to travel in this vale of tears; He knows what it means to suffer; He knows what it means to walk in the valley of the shadow of death. Therefore, He looks upon you with compassion born of experience.

It was this compassion that caused JESUS to comfort the grieving widow of Nain and return to her, her son, from the darkness of death. JESUS, who is the source of all comfort, with a Word, spoke life into the lifeless flesh of this young man, and he opened his eyes and lived. To the mother of the dead young man, JESUS, the Hope of the hopeless and the very LORD and Giver of life, said, *“Do not weep”* and through His Word, that is exactly what the widow of Nain and her son received, hope and life, for JESUS is God and the power of God is in His Word.

You see, the Word of God is *performative*. By that, I mean that the Word of God accomplishes the purposes for which God sends it, and God’s purpose for you is life and salvation. For God desires not the death of a sinner. He desires *“mercy and not sacrifice.”* So just as CHRIST reached out to form man from the dust of the earth and create life where there was none, so too, JESUS reached out to touch the side of the young man’s coffin, and create life where there was no life—all through the power of His creative Word alone.

It is no different for you today, for in His compassion our LORD JESUS comes to you with the same Word of hope, salvation, and eternal life—the same Word He spoke in mercy and compassion to the widow of Nain— *“Do not weep.”* Having become man, our LORD absorbed into Himself not simply our flesh, but, as I said, all we experience; all we feel and all we fear; He even absorbed into Himself our death. On the Cross, JESUS put to death our death. In His grave, death was buried, and when He rose again on the third day, death was left in that grave to mold and decay.

To the widow of Nain, JESUS said, *“Do not weep.”* To her son, JESUS said, *“Young man, I say to you, arise.”* The young man did arise and JESUS gave Him to His mother. Yet, in the end, this man would still die. But to you, JESUS has proclaimed these Words of eternal life, *“I baptize you in the Name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY SPIRIT.”*

With this simple phrase, in and with the washing of water, you have passed from death unto life and temporal death is, for you, no longer anything more than the door to paradise. For on the day of your Baptism, the old you died with CHRIST in His crucifixion, and there arose out of those blessed waters a new life, a new creation, a new you, with the gift of eternal life in JESUS’ resurrection. From the Baptismal waters a new you arose and our LORD, through your pastor, gave you back to your mother, the Church.

Our LORD JESUS is, therefore, the Destroyer of death and corruption. He is the One in whom we live and breathe and have our being. He is the One who came from heaven above to take on our flesh and restore our nature to that which was originally intended. Taking on not only our flesh but also our sins and our death, JESUS has set free our death-laden bodies from the bonds of sin and the grave.

This, JESUS does with His own Body, for in Him, and Him alone is Life. It is the Holy Body of JESUS that brings to life the dead young man, and it is the Holy Body of JESUS that brings life to all believers. It is the holy Body of CHRIST that is the salvation of all humanity. The Flesh of JESUS, the Almighty Word, is the Body of Life, clothed in His might and in His righteousness. Thus, the Flesh of CHRIST has the power of giving life and completely annihilates the influence of death and corruption because it is the Flesh of the Incarnate Living Word, through His bloody death and crucifixion, that gives life to all.

So it is, that JESUS feeds and strengthens His Church on that very Body, given for you, and that very Blood, poured out for you, for the forgiveness of all sins. This is the Body and Blood with which JESUS entered the Most Holy Place, the Holy of Holies, once for all, to obtain eternal redemption and therefore, eternal life. It is this Body and Blood JESUS gives to you, here at His altar in, with, and under the bread and wine of His Holy Supper.

In CHRIST, JESUS death is now undone having been conquered by Life. In the great struggle between Life and death, Life holds the field forever, and the reign of death is forever ended. Through JESUS' death and resurrection, death is swallowed up by death and it has lost its sting forever. JESUS' power over death is proclaimed to all creation in His resurrection and He has given His victory over death and the grave to you through His Word and in His Holy Blessed Sacraments. He has announced your victory over death in Him before His FATHER and the angels with His blessed Words of absolution, *"I forgive you all your sins."*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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