

Saint Thomas' and St Thomas' of the Air Church
Trinity XVI
September 12, 2021
rmcneely+

Young man, I say unto thee.... Arise.

Father Swithen was struggling with this week's sermon. But he and his wife were moving house and he had to spend much of the week boxing and sorting and lifting. He came upon a box under their bed. It contained three eggs and \$1,000 in cash. He could not imagine how it got there so he asked his good wife.

She responded that throughout their marriage she had been keeping track of her husband's sermons and every time he gave a bad one, or laid an egg, she took one of the hen's eggs and put in it in the box under their bed.

Father took some solace in this. He was elated and thought he must have done well with only three eggs in the box over all that time. But what was the \$1,000 for he asked. His kind wife being a frugal vicar's wife said, well every time there were a dozen eggs; I sold them.

Let is all hope I will not find an egg under our bed in the morning.

Today's Gospel is known by many as the story of the "Widow of Nain".

It takes place during Jesus' Galilean ministry;

that early time when Jesus ministered to His home province.

Only the day before

Jesus had healed the servant of the Centurion

who was deathly ill

And a growing crowd began to follow Him.

Some to see what magic He would perform

Others to be with the man they thought of as the Messiah

Some as skeptics to be able to see and declare fraud.

On this day two large bodies of people collided in the narrow gate of the small town of Nain.

Jesus and the throng that was following Him across Galilee was about to enter the city as a funeral procession and most of the city's inhabitants were leaving to bury a young man in the cemetery.

The mother of the dead young man is the early focus of the story.

Her only son had died.

But before him, her husband had died.

In the culture of the time, the circumstance was not just a sad one as it would be for any of us. It could be a death sentence for the widow.

When her husband had died, the widow became dependent upon her son for her very survival

When her son died , she was on her own.

In the agricultural world at the time

The job market for women was non-existent

She was fully dependent upon charity of friends and family for food and shelter

Chances were good that the widow would slowly starve to death in the cold

But there is also her crushing grief.

I don't think one can ever truly comprehend what it is like for a parent to lose a child unless you have been there yourself. There is probably nothing harder in this life.

The scene at the Gate of Nain was one of despair,
of death
without hope.

Turn away from the despair for a moment and look to see the other procession meeting this one.

At the head of this procession is another Only Son.

And He leads, not a procession of death

But of Life

No one asked Him to

But, Jesus touches the funeral bier

and nothing was ever quite the same after that.

Life touches Death.

In our world, death always wins when the instruments of death touch life:

Whether by fatal disease

Bullets

Speeding cars

Angry fists

Life gives way to death in our world

But it is not so with Jesus

He is here to undo our broken world

To undo death itself

Jesus is the one who will wipe every tear from our eyes

And so when Jesus touches death,

death must give way.

“Young man, I say to thee arise.” And the son is restored to his mother.

There are several messages imparted to us in this story.

In almost the same location and thousands of years before
Elijah raised another son from the dead:

In the Old Testament story of the widow of Zarephath.

Luke uses the same obscure wording to describe the return
Of the son to the widow of Nain
As was written in the Old Testament story.
Those witnessing the event could not help but make
The connection. Did it foretell the Messiah?
All those concepts are important and meaningful
You have heard them from me before
Over the years.

And having mastered those important and fundamental precepts,
Let's take one further step this morning:
And ask the question:
As interesting as this 2000 year old story may be
Does the Church give it to us only for historic purposes?

Certainly the Church edifies us with the story:
The Lord's compassion and mercy
His divinity and sovereign authority
His Messianic Mission on Earth.

But surely, the purpose of Jesus' earthly life
Was more than to raise to life
A few isolated individuals from the dead
As miraculous as that was?

Rather, is it not, the salvation of all mankind through His Church
Until His Coming Again?
The Church often recounts a past event but sees and treats it as a
present reality.
Is there perhaps a more immediate message for us?

I think the answer is this:

You see, those things that happened all those many years ago

And all those many thousands of miles away
Are happening sacramentally in our lives
Right here.
Yes.
Right now.

This very morning, in His Holy Church
during this very Holy Communion.
Jesus repeats the miracle
Not in a physical sense,
But in a spiritual manner.

The miracles Jesus performed and are preserved for us in Holy
Scripture
Are not just unique in themselves
But are with reference to the future.

It is rightly to be said that the miracle of restoring the Widow's son
to life foreshadows that which He achieves through the Holy
Sacrifice and Communion.

Just as our physical lives begin
when two cells miraculously combine
in the womb of our mother

So our spiritual lives begin
with the water of baptism
and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

But as our physical lives cease
Our spiritual lives rise to life
Transfigured into the glory of Heavenly
Eternal life.

But during the course of our lives
Our spiritual lives are threatened
Just as our physical lives may be threatened.

Can we see in the death of the son of the Widow of Nain
The symbolic death of our own souls?
Every bit as tragic and forlorn.

Jesus but touches the funeral bier
And we are restored to spiritual life.

Jesus gave us two sacraments
We have spoken of baptism
As the birth of our spiritual lives.

Let us now consider the other sacrament
Holy Communion.
As the restoration of our spiritual lives.

From time to time
Our souls are tarnished and torn by our sins.
Left unaided, they fester, whither and our spiritual lives are in
jeopardy.
In some, spiritual life dies.
A tragedy greater than the end of our physical lives.

By the Grace of God
Rescue is not far away.
Not far at all.
In fact, right here and right now.

It is in the Holy Communion

That Jesus repeats the miracle
 Of the raising to life
 of the son
 of the widow of Nain,
 By raising us back to spiritual life in the Communion.
 Spiritual resurrection and renewal

In mystery the historical becomes the present

The service, the liturgy and the Church itself bears witness to the
 mystery of how it happens.

The lights, the sounds, the chants, bells,
 The alleluias, the sacred adjuncts,
 even the flowers and the vestments
 all point to the truth that at the Gospel
 Jesus appears and speaks to our hearts.

We are reminded that in the Mass, we and eternity are transfixed in
 time.

The entire mass bears witness to its mysterium character.
 The Collect is a prayer for goodness and God's help to preserve the
 Church.

Paul's Epistle is a prayer that we be strengthened by His Spirit
 That Christ may dwell in our hearts
 And that grounded in Love
 We may comprehend the extent
 and love of Christ in our lives.
 A prayer for the raising up of our spiritual life.

In the Mass

We plea for resurrection and
are released and freed from our sins
And as we accept the Body and Blood of Our Lord
The mystery is complete.
The spiritual awakening is accomplished.

As we depart the Lord bends down and says;
Go in Peace. Holy Communion has given the strength
To live and to walk in the spirit.

We walk into the Church perhaps spiritually inanimate
But return home re-enlivened.

In the words of our Lord
I say unto thee . . . arise.