

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church  
September 20, 2026  
Trinity XVI  
rmcneely+

Young man, I say unto thee...arise

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 trick He would perform

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

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

On this day two large bodies of people collided in the narrow gate  
of the small town of Nain, not far from Nazareth.

Jesus and the throng that was following Him across Galilee  
were 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.

You see, 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 of the time

The job market for elderly 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 death,  
despair,  
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

Life touches Death

and nothing was ever quite the same after that.

In our world

When the instruments of death touch life:

Whether by fatal disease

Bullets

Speeding cars

Angry fists

Life always gives way to death.

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. You see  
    Thousands of years before and in almost the same location  
    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 used 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.  
    Over the years  
    You have heard them from me before.

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.  
    His power over death.

Surely, as miraculous as it was,  
the purpose of Jesus' earthly life  
Was more than to raise to life  
A few isolated individuals from the dead.

Rather, is not His purpose, 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 little miracle Church  
And during this very Holy Communion  
Jesus repeats the miracle;  
Not in a physical sense,  
But in a spiritual one.

The miracles Jesus performed are preserved for us in Holy  
Scripture

And 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  
Jesus achieves through  
the Holy Sacrifice and Communion.

Just as our physical lives begin  
when two cells miraculously combine  
in our mother's womb;  
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.

But 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

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 bear witness to the  
mystery of how it happens.

The lights, the sounds, the chants, the bells, the hymns

The alleluias, the sacred adjuncts,

even the flowers and the vestments

all point to the truth that in His 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 mystery

Its character.

Today's 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 us 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.

