

LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL

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Feast of All Souls

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Luke 7:11-17 Jesus went to a town called Nain, accompanied by his disciples and a great number of people. When he was near the gate of the town it happened that a dead man was being carried out for burial, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a considerable number of the townspeople were with her.

When the Lord saw her he felt sorry for her. 'Do not cry' he said. Then he went up and put his hand on the bier and the bearers stood still, and he said, 'Young man, I tell you to get up.' And the dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Everyone was filled with awe and praised God saying, 'A great prophet has appeared among us; God has visited his people.' And this opinion of him spread throughout Judaea and all over the countryside.

Thought for the day

As often, this story from Luke is one of the best remembered in the Gospels. Partly this is because Luke is such an excellent writer. Perhaps even more, it is because the story touches everyone.

Untimely death is known to all of us, whether by illness or accident or sometimes by violence. We would love to be able to say to the bereaved, "do not weep"! But we can say it at another level: *Jesus is the first-fruits of all who have fallen asleep.* This is our faith. He represents the God of the living, "for whom all are alive." In him, who rose from the dead, our hope of resurrection dawned.

KIERAN O'MAHONY OSA - www.tarsus.ie

Every day we read news about the cruelest of happenings and watch images of mass destruction, murders, catastrophes, deaths of innocent victims, as we carry on with our lives without being concerned. When tragedy is nearer home and suffering affects someone close to us, we are more disturbed and we don't know how to avoid the situation, to regain the serenity we lost. Frequently that's exactly what we seek – to recover the serenity we lost. In a thousand ways we try to avoid suffering, sedate our hearts against the pain others endure, and remain at a distance from everything that can disturb our peace.

The attitude of Jesus reveals to us how terribly low our level of humanity has sunk. Jesus is someone who lives each day with profound joy. But his joy is not the fruit of a careful avoidance of suffering – his own or that of others. It has its roots in the joyful experience of God who welcomes and saves all.

For this reason, his joy is not a sedative that prevents him from being sensitive to the misery around him. When Jesus sees a mother weep over the death of her only son, he does not slip away quietly. He reacts by coming close to the sorrow of the mother as a brother and friend. He deeply loves those who are suffering and he can suffer with them and alleviate their pain. As his disciples we are called to follow in his footsteps.

JOSÉ A PAGOLA - *Following in the Footsteps of Jesus, Year C*

This dramatic story highlights the compassion of Jesus, his power over death and the link between him and the great prophets who went before him.

Widows and orphans appear a lot in the Old Testament because they represent potentially the most vulnerable and oppressed group in society. Without a husband or a father (or a son) to mind them they were subject to exploitation.

In the Bible the compassion of God is not some disembodied 'spiritual' reality; it always shows itself in action on behalf of the most oppressed. When we gather for Mass we need to remind ourselves that we not only receive the Body of Christ but that we are called to be the Body of Christ – the compassion of God in the world.

SEAN GOAN - *Let the Reader Understand, Year C*

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. True compassion of one person for another can change a situation. When has the capacity of another person to empathise with you, and feel with you in a situation, made a difference? When has your compassion been a source of comfort and strength to another?
2. After Jesus had visited their town the people in Nain thought: "God has visited his people". Bring to mind encounters you have had, or events you have attended, that left you with a greater than usual sense of the presence of God in that experience.
3. The miracle is a reminder to us of our belief that Christ has conquered death and because of that our mortal death is not the end. How does this belief affect your attitude towards your own mortality, and to the deaths of significant people in your life?
4. This was not the final raising from the dead for this man. He would die again. In a less dramatic way we can all experience times when we feel dead, and later come back to life, to great vitality. What has helped you to come to life again after a period when you felt down, dispirited or apparently lifeless?

JOHN BYRNE OSA - Intercom

Lord, so often we write people off; alcoholics and drug addicts; delinquent children; vagrants and those we call unemployable.

We thank you for the times that you sent Jesus into our town accompanied by his disciples and a large number of people who were strong in their compassion.

They made us stand still and got those whom we were carrying out for burial, to stand up and speak for themselves. They were given back to their mothers and we were filled with awe and praised you for having visited your people.

Lord, we sometimes feel that the church is no longer relevant to the lives of many people. We conclude that we need more learned teaching and more organisations.

But if people see the church living the story of Jesus, going into towns, feeling compassion for those who mourn, telling them not to cry, and giving them back their reason for living, then they will be filled with hope and joy.

Lord we pray for countries that are experiencing violence. Raise up people like Jesus who will stop the violence so that all people, especially the young, will experience joy in their lives and will have a reason to live again.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL - *Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels, Year C*

Jesus 'had compassion' for the widow burying her son. The Greek term describes a very physical reaction: 'a turning over of the insides' with compassion. It is usually translated as 'felt sorry' or 'moved with pity', but these expressions don't capture the depth of the emotion evoked.

When Jesus identifies with a hurt person, his entire being is affected, resulting in an outpouring of love.

Think of a time when you really felt for someone, experiencing a 'turning over of the insides'. How did you respond? Sometimes all we need to do is to be present.

Recall a time when you were in pain or suffering. Who reached out to you? Know that Jesus feels a depth of compassion for us and is with us always.

FIÓNÁ DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT —Go Deeper