

Tenth Sunday in Ord. Time C/2013

The readings of this Sunday talk about the power of God to give life. They invite us to put into God's hands all our problems, especially the things for which we feel powerless to resolve.

The first reading of the book of Kings recalls the story of Prophet Elijah and the widow of Zarephat. In fact, at the time the prophet enjoyed the hospitality of the widow of Zarephat, her son died. For the woman, it was because of the presence of the prophet that God punished her for her past sins. Touched by the sadness of the widow at the death of her son as well by her complaint, Elijah took the boy in the upper room and prayed to God. After the prayer, the boy came back to life.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is the master of death and life. For that reason, he can give life beyond the physical death of human beings. Those who lead his people, like the prophet, participate in his healing power and can do the same work that God accomplishes. Another idea is the truth that God listens to the prayer of his people any time they call upon him.

This text allows us to understand the stakes of today's Gospel as Jesus raises from the dead the only child of a widow of Nain. First of all, the Gospel says that Jesus was sojourning in the city of Nain. At the gate of the city, he met a funeral procession and people who were going to the cemetery with a dead man, whose mother was a widow.

When he saw them, he was moved with compassion. Then, he addressed the mother and invited her to stop weeping. After that, he stepped forward and touched the coffin so that the bearers stopped. He ordered the dead young man to arise and he effectively did and started speaking. Jesus, then, gave him back to his mother.

The crowd, for its part, was seized with fear and glorified God by confessing that a great prophet was in their midst and God had visited his people. Meanwhile, the report about Jesus spread through the whole of Judea and in the entire surrounding region.

What do we learn from these readings? The premier thing I want to highlight is that God is the master of life and death. To say that God is the master of life and death is a strong statement which requires clarification. In itself, it means not only that God is in control when it is about our life and death, but also that God knows everything which happens to us, be it life or death. In that sense, God rejoices with us when we are happy and cries with us when we weep. That is exactly what Jesus does anytime he is confronted with a difficult situation that provokes his compassion.

In fact, God in himself is life. Because he is life, he is the source and the fountain of life of human beings. The life we enjoy today and we have inherited from our parents comes from God. Our parents are just the instruments through which God channels his life to us. In that sense, God is the master of life and life itself is his gift.

However, life is fragile and short; it is a fleeing good we cannot totally control. That is why whatever might be our life on earth, it all ends up in physical death. In that sense, death is constitutive of human nature. We live with the assurance that one day we will die. We cannot escape the reality of death, whatever might be the progress of medicine.

That we have to die one day shows that life on earth is limited. But we do not die in order to finish our life that way, but rather in order to raise to new life. That is why Christian death contains a prospect of eternal life and a promise of immortality. We certainly die, but with the hope of eternal life in heaven. That prospect of eternal life finds its foundation in the resurrection of Jesus. As Jesus lived, suffered, died and rose from the dead, we too will pass by the same process. We live, suffer, die and rise in order to share in the resurrection of Jesus.

When will we die? How will we die? Nobody knows the time or the moment we will die. There is a real secret about our life and death that God alone has the key to its understanding. Moreover, because God is the source of life, he alone knows the plan he has inscribed to each one of us about the longevity of our life. It does not matter if we are young or old. As a philosopher said, "Once we are born, we are old enough to die".

That is a reality that each one of us should be aware of. It is not a question of living in fear because we will die, but of being realistic by knowing that death can come to us at anytime. Most important, then, is not to know when we will die, but rather how will die. In that sense, our daily preparation is more important than anything else.

The second thing I want to bring is about the anticipation of eternal life in the present time. In fact, in both cases cited in today's readings, namely in the first reading and in the Gospel, the two dead came back to life.

However, we have to realize that those people died again and did not live eternally on earth. What the prophet Elijah did as well as Jesus is to let them taste in advance the fruit of immortality. In that sense, their living again has a character of anticipation of eternal life and not that of perpetual eternal life.

In fact, anytime we are sick or close to death and recover, we are tasting the fruit of immortality. Our gaining in strength and recovery has a temporary character, because after all we will finally die. The definitive character of our life will come only the day we will see the Lord face to face and participate in his life in heaven. In that sense, our life on earth is provisional. The same is true about the things we enjoy in this world; they are provisional and not eternal. That is why it would be a mistake to love the things of this world as though they are eternal.

Let us pray, then, that God may open our years so to that we come to appreciate the things of this world in the limit of their character as provisional. Let us offer to the Lord all the problems we have so that he may help us see and bear them with his grace. May God bless you all!

1 Kings 17: 17-24; Galatians 1: 11-19; Luke 7: 11-17



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