

Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2016

The readings of this Sunday talk about the power of God to give life. They invite us to put into God's hands our hardships and problems, especially when we feel powerless to resolve them.

The first reading recalls the story of the Prophet Elijah and the widow of Zarephat. It shows how, at the time the prophet was enjoying her hospitality, her son died and she thought it was because of his presence in her home.

Then, it talks about the reaction of Elijah who implored God to bring life back to the boy. The text ends up with the recovery of the boy and the witness of the widow about the grandeur of God and the veracity of the man of God.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is the master of death and life. There is also the idea that the men of God participate by their ministry in the power of God to give life. The last idea is the truth that God listens to the prayer of those who call upon him in their need.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus raises from the dead the only child of a widow of Nain. First of all, the Gospel starts with the journey of Jesus in the city of Nain. Then, it talks about the funeral procession of a young man whose mother was a widow. After that, it speaks of the reaction of Jesus and how, moved by compassion, he came to raise from death that young man. The Gospel ends with the reaction of the crowd who credited Jesus being a great prophet.

What do we learn from today's readings? Today I want to talk about the importance of dying with a clear vision of living again. What do I mean by that? Let me explain. In fact, in today's first reading as well as in the Gospel, we are dealing with two cases of people who died but were brought to life again.

In the first reading, it is about the son of a widow that the prophet Elijah brings to life. In the Gospel, it is the case of an only son of a widow mother that Jesus raises from death. In both cases, it is about people living again after they had been dead.

From these two narratives, let us highlight a couple of things. First. Life, as beautiful as it might be, is fragile and short. It is a fleeing thing that even the progress of medicine cannot contain. In that sense, death is constitutive of human nature, because whatever might be our life on earth, rich or poor, young or old, it ends up in physical death. Therefore, we live with the assurance that one day we will die.

But, when will we die? How will we die? In which circumstances will we die? None of us can answer with exactitude to these questions. In truth, nobody knows the time or the moment he will die. There is a real secret about our life and death that God alone has the key to its understanding. As a philosopher said, "Once we are born, we are old enough to die".

Second, because there is a real secret about our life on earth, only God, who is at the source of life, knows the plan he has inscribed to each one of us about the longevity of our life. Only God can respond to many questions we have about life and death and to which there is no answer now.

What I am saying here is not destined to bring us to live in fear because we will die, but rather to open our eyes so that we live wisely in the world, knowing well that our life on earth is transitory. Therefore, we have to live prudently in the world by making a clear distinction between what is essential for us from what is accessory, what is good from what is wrong, what is a godly way of life and what is ungodly.

Third. Even if we will die, we still, however, keep the hope of eternal life. That is why we do not die in order to finish our life in nothingness, but rather to raise to new life. In other words, 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.

Those elements of death and life are exemplified in the attitude of Elijah and Jesus. In fact, the prophet did not prevent the son of the widow to die, as well as Jesus did not prevent the death of the only son of the mother. However, though they did die, they raised up from death.

By doing so, the prophet Elijah proved that he was invested with the power of God to make the dead live. By doing so, Jesus showed that he was the master of death and life. Moreover, he rejoices with those who rejoice and suffers with those who suffer. 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.

However, we have to realize that those people that Elijah and Jesus raised from the dead 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 had a character of anticipation of eternal life and not that of perpetual 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 God face to face as we 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 ephemeral 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 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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