

## **Homily on the Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Luke 3)**

**Father Filip Lommaert**

**Sunday, October 10, 2021**

In the name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One God. Amen!

Today we listened to the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke. We heard how Jesus and His disciples went to the village of Nain. This village still exists and is situated in Northern Israel, about 6 miles southeast of Nazareth. In this village there is still a church called The Church of the Resurrection of the Widow's Son. This church is affiliated with the Catholic Church.

This church was built between the fourth and fifth centuries. This ensured that the small town of Nain became a Christian pilgrimage destination, and the church quickly became known as a holy place.

When Jesus came to Nain that day; He did not arrive at a time of joy and happiness in the village. What greeted Him was a scene of great grief and mourning. The name "Nain" literally means "beauty." But that day there was no beauty in Nain. Death had invaded the little town of Nain.

We know that the deceased is a young man and that he is "the only son of his mother". As Christ our Saviour arrives, a great crowd of mourners are making their way through the gates of the small town to a small graveyard, where he is to be buried.

As was the custom in that day, the people of Nain had stopped what they were doing and had joined the funeral procession as it made its way through the village. The mother would have been in front. She would have been followed by those who carried the open coffin, which contained the body of her son.

Behind them would have been those who were mourning the boy's death. Those bringing up the rear would have been the town's folk who followed out of respect for the dead.

The loss of her only child, and already being a widow, would have been a terrible ordeal for this poor woman. For now, she had no one left to care for her in her old age. There was no social security to care for widows like her. It was up to a woman's children, especially her sons, to see that she was cared for in her declining years.

She has no one left! She is all alone, helpless and caught in a desperate situation. She has nothing to look forward to except poverty and despair. She has nowhere to go and nowhere to turn. She finds herself trapped in a helpless situation. She would probably end up begging or prostituting herself to survive.

We are told that Jesus had "compassion" on this woman. When He saw her, He understood her circumstances and He knew what kind of future she would be facing. His heart was touched by her, and He did something about it. She had not invited Jesus, yet He came anyway. He came to her at that very moment where she needed Him most! She probably did not even know about our Lord and Saviour, but He knew about her.

After calming the mother, Jesus merely speaks to the dead young man, and he immediately shows two clear signs of life. First, he sat up and then he spoke.

Just as He had for that mother, Jesus operated in grace for this son. He had not asked to be raised up; but he was raised anyway. He intervened in a hopeless and helpless situation and changed it for the glory of God!

Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, acted with grace and power and broke up that little funeral procession that day. He gave a son back to his mother and restored this family. He gave them hope in place of fear. He gave them life in the place of death. He gave them everything they needed to turn around and go home with joy in their hearts!

This is one of three resurrections performed by our Lord Jesus Christ as recorded in the Gospels. The other two being the raising of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44) and that of the daughter of Jairus (Lk 8:41-56 ). They confirm the promise given to the prophet Ezekiel that God will one day open the graves and raise all the dead (Ezk 37: 1-14). Many people have exercised authority over the living; only the Son of God “has power over both the living and the dead” (funeral service).

The miracle he performs is not about demonstrating His power, but about healing the widow’s broken heart. God is not interested in power. God does not need to prove Himself. The thing He wants us to know is that He cares for all of us personally in every detail of our lives.

The good news of the Gospel, however, is the unfathomable compassion of our Saviour. God sent his Son to save us from the consequences of our actions, our suffering. God sent his Son to restore us to the blessedness for which He created us.

He came to heal us, to stop us from weeping, and even to raise us from the dead into the glory of the heavenly kingdom. He came to unite us to Himself in holiness. The Son of God touched the coffin of the dead man, and he arose. Christ’s compassion for us is so profound and great that He also entered a coffin, a tomb, and even descended into Hades, the underworld, the place where the dead dwell.

He did this because, out of love for humankind, He could not simply stand by and allow us to bear the full consequences of our actions.

Let me make one thing clear though: Extending Christ's compassion to others is not the same thing as being a "a nice person", or being very likeable and popular, or being very good at telling people only what they like to hear.

Oh no! It took discipline, strength, and courage for the Lord to show compassion throughout His entire earthly ministry, especially during His journey to the Cross. Every time He performed one of the miracles we read about in the Gospels, He was very much aware that the Pharisees, and maybe even the Romans, were following His every move. Because with everything he said and did, He was offending and accusing them.

Therefore, if we want to live a life where we act and speak with holy compassion, we should know that others will be offended and that they might react.

Being a disciple of Christ, and an Orthodox one at that, is a way of life and a calling for the brave, not the weak-hearted, which will require strength of character, discipline, and self-control. It will require a willingness to be mocked and humiliated.

But because the Saviour has come to us purely out of love for fallen, broken, sinful humanity, we must share His compassionate love with everyone we encounter, especially those whom we are inclined to ignore or condemn for whatever reason.

For we must not relate to Jesus Christ purely as individuals, but as members of His Body who share a common life. If we are members of His Body and receive His Body and Blood in the Eucharist, then we cannot disregard Him even in “the least of these” whose hearts and lives are broken, regardless of who is at fault for the circumstances?

Our Lord is a Person, not an abstract idea. Prepared by prayer, fasting, and confession, let us unite ourselves to Him in the Eucharist, receiving His compassionate mercy even as we extend the same holy concern to our neighbours, our loved ones, and especially our enemies.

He came to call sinners to repentance, to heal the sick, and to raise the dead. He came to save, bless, and restore people who are as broken and wanting as we all are. If we are to receive Him, then we must also receive them. Even though it might be difficult for us to believe, He does work through us to extend His compassion to others. To be in Him is to become a living icon of His mercy, a personal sign of His salvation.

Amen.