

Sunday: Ordinary 10, Cycle C, 6.5.16
 Scripture: 1 Kings 17:17-24, 13/Gal 1:11,19/
 Lk 7:11-17

THE TOUCH THAT BRINGS NEW HOPE AND LIFE

The focus of the Mass always begins in the Word of God, the scriptural texts assigned for the given Sunday. So our attention today is turned to these rather tragic parallel tales from the Book of Kings in the Old Testament and the Gospel of Luke. This often happens in our Sunday readings where the mighty works of God in the ancient world are echoed and fulfilled in the words and deeds of Jesus. Today's readings reveal dramatic displays of compassion. The gospel, in particular, presents all the charm, color, suspense and pathos of a good short story. As Jesus enters the city of Nain two crowds met, approaching from different directions. One was the large crowd that accompanied Jesus. The other was the large crowd coming from the city in a funeral procession.



Here in these stories we have two widows, both grieving for the loss of their sons – one a child and one a man. Here we have double tragedies – not only has each woman lost her child, her son, but in the culture of the ancient Near East and first-century Palestine, each woman lost her security and her future. They are now legally defenseless, and are without any degree of social status. They are now women without a voice, forsaken and left empty. They have been made vulnerable by laws which were biased against women. With a husband gone and now losing a male son, they have

nowhere to turn. They are at the mercy of the people around them. The only question in their minds must be: *What will become of me now?* The scriptures open up to us the ageless sorrow of the world, and the tears: the world of broken hearts. We only have to imagine the power of Michelangelo's sculpture, the Pieta – the mother cradling the body of her son in death – which evokes such heartfelt pity.

Not being a parent it's difficult for me to imagine how overwhelming the loss of a child must be for any mother or father. No matter how one loses a child, whether by prolonged illness or sudden death, the loss of a child is perhaps the most profound, the most overwhelming, the most inconsolable of losses to deal with. It violates the natural order of things--- your children are not supposed to die before you. Your love for your child is unconditional and pure--- perhaps the most profound attachment you will ever have. It evokes rage at the injustice of it all -- it's not fair for an innocent to lose his or her potential and fail to see their dreams fulfilled.

Friday I received a text message from one of our parishioners with a photo of her son Andrew who had just hiked to the top of Mount Whitney in California. It's 14,500 feet high and the tallest summit in 48 of our states except Alaska. What a thrill it must have been for Andrew when he got to the top of that mountain and looked down, seeing behind him all that he had to climb in order to get to the top. What a sense of achievement for this young man. And when I saw the photo I couldn't help but think back fourteen years ago when Andrew was only eight years old and in third grade.

I recalled an alarming phone call one evening those many years ago asking for prayers for one of our youngsters in the parish who had a terrible accident on a child's scooter. This same tall, handsome, athletic guy, now hiking mountains, was in

Children's Hospital in critical condition, with a severe head injury and crushed arm bone. He was in a coma for four days and everyone feared for Andrew's very life. With the help of amazing doctors, the support of his family and friends and a lot of prayers storming the heavens on his behalf, Andrew pulled through that childhood trauma, went on to Acalanes where he was an excellent lacrosse player and then on to college in the East where he graduated a couple years ago and is now getting ready to attend graduate school at Vanderbilt University. I'm sure his mountaintop experience on Friday helped him to put a lot of his life's journey in perspective. He could look back over those many years and especially that early tragedy and know how God was with him to guide him and bring so much fulfillment. He received the healing touch of Christ whose love brought him back to life.



His mom told me that, as he was preparing for his hiking adventure, she gave him her medal of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to take with him. On any mountain trek, size and weight are at a premium; you only take what you absolutely need. But Andrew's mom knew the little medal wouldn't be a problem for him to carry. She told him that she carried it with her at all times, especially if she was facing something significant or challenging. Her son, now a healthy young man, but once a little boy at death's door, had the power of a mother's prayer still working on his behalf. Andrew reached the top of Mount McKinley on Friday. Neither he nor his mom realized – Friday was the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Jesus' healing touch was still reaching out and raising up a mother's beloved son.

These scripture stories of the two sons being brought back to life renew our hope in the power of God at work in even what seem to be hopeless situations. The stories offer us two lessons about mercy and compassion – the themes at the heart of Pope Francis' call to a jubilee "Year of Mercy." First, there are no limits to the scope of the healing love of God. Neither the prophet Elijah nor Jesus withheld their power because of social convention. No questions were asked; there was no hesitation. When it comes to the reign of God, all are invited. It's never a question of who is worthy; all are welcome. However, the reign of God comes through other people, through those who have been sent to witness, to proclaim and to heal. The scripture stories were signs and instructions for Jesus' disciples. As they saw the Master do, so they, in turn, were to offer their lives for the sake of serving others. Jesus said to his disciples: *I am telling you the truth: those who believe in me will do what I do—yes, they will do even greater things.*

EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY

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Secondly, in the Church, we need to recover compassion as soon as possible as the way of life that is proper to Jesus' followers. We need to rescue it from a sentimental and moralizing notion that has discredited it. Mercy that demands justice is Jesus' great command: *Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful*. We need this compassion today more than ever. Consider the human tragedy of epic proportions in Syria. An estimated 400,000 people have died, 6.5 million have been internally displaced and nearly 5 million have fled the country. The centers of power – be they church or government, social or economical -- consider everything except the sufferings of victims. They function as if nobody were hurting or losing.

Jesus' communities should listen to the cry of those who weep. We have to take seriously the suffering of the innocent. Society should not accept suffering as something normal, for it's unacceptable to God, who does not want to see anyone crying. According to the gospel story: *When the Lord saw her, he was moved with pity for her and said to her, "Do not weep."* It would be difficult to describe better the Prophet of God's compassion. He doesn't know the woman, but he takes time to look at her. He captures her pain and aloneness, and he is moved very profoundly. The dejection of that woman reaches deep inside him. His reaction is immediate: *Do not weep*. Jesus cannot stand seeing someone cry. He needs to intervene.

Who will be the recipient of your mercy this week? In whose life will you intervene to dry the tears and to extend the touch of Jesus that will bring someone back to life?

Fr. John Kasper, OSFS