

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Sep 17th 2013

As I read and reflected on Jesus' raising the son of the widow of Nain, I was struck by what Jesus did and how he cared for the woman who had lost her son. First, there are two groups on the road; there is the group of relatives, friends, and mourners with the widow, and then there is the group with Jesus. One group is mourning with and for a woman who has lost her only son, and the other group, led by Jesus, has been proclaiming God's love and presence in the world by preaching that God's reign is near and healing the sick.

For Jewish people, the dead are unclean, by definition. So for Jesus to touch the bier on which they were carrying the deceased young man was to make himself unclean. I imagine that those carrying the bier stopped in shock, as they realized what Jesus had done. By his actions, Jesus showed that it was more important to tend to the grieving mother than it was to remain ritually clean. Jesus' compassion for the mother made him go beyond the bounds of ritual purity and what people thought was 'ok.'

Yet despite the shock of those carrying the dead man and the crowd that someone would touch something that would make them unclean, Jesus' concern for the mother makes him reach out. In his reaching out, Jesus delivers a loud message to the young man, "Arise!" If the crowd had been shocked by what Jesus had done in touching the bier with the dead man, they must have been astonished at the young man sitting up and talking to his mother. The power that Jesus showed in healing the young man was a power to heal and transform. Jesus acted out of compassion, as a son who loved his own mother.

This passage asks me to consider where I put limits on what God can do in my life and in our world. How often do I think or act as if a situation is beyond help or beyond any progress, because I choose to believe "that's just the way it is and I can't possibly make any difference." This passage also reminds me that the fruit of my prayer should lead to action: it should lead me to thoughtfully consider another's point of view or to be more compassionate towards someone I struggle to be with. It most certainly pushes me beyond my comfort level, as I often don't want to be bothered with laboring to change my own attitudes, beliefs, or perceptions.

Jesus models a love and care for others that goes beyond boundaries and beyond preconceived notions of what is all right. I pray for courage for all of us to let ourselves be dipped in God's tremendous love so that we can freely share that love with others. Let's pray for the wisdom of the Spirit to guide us in changing what we need to change and having the courage to choose to change.

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