

## COMFORT IN GRIEF: 10<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF YEAR C

What do we do when we come across someone who is in trouble or pain? If we don't know them personally, maybe we shrug our shoulders, and just keep going to the next thing in our lives. That is not what Jesus did, and it is not what he wants us to do. So let's pay attention to what we can learn from him in today's gospel story.

He and his apostles are on their way into the little town of Nain. But as they start to go in, another group of people starts to come out. They form a funeral procession around a young man who has died, and around his weeping mother. In that society she has no resources of her own. She has depended entirely, first on her deceased husband, and more recently on her son, now deceased as well, for her survival and social standing. Although *'a considerable number of the townspeople were with her'*, they are too poor themselves to help much afterwards.

Jesus takes in the scene at a glance. His heart is filled with compassion for the widow woman. His eyes fill with tears at her plight. Without being asked by anyone to do anything at all, he walks over to her and says, *'don't cry'*. By themselves those words might have sounded empty and hollow. But he doesn't just speak words of sympathy and understanding. Our story-teller says that *'he went up and put his hand on the stretcher'*. He then said to the dead man, *'Young man, I tell you to get up.'* With that *'the dead man sat up and began to walk, and Jesus gave him to his mother'*.

What a touching detail! She is clearly one of the poor little ones for whom the arrival of Jesus on the scene is *'good news'* indeed. His powerful intervention has given both Mother and Son a new future together.

On experiencing this, the people round about recognise that God has visited them in the person of Jesus. So they make their feelings loud and clear. *'A great prophet has appeared among us,'* they cry out, *'God has visited his people.'*

That incident, though, does not mean that in our situations, all grief can be avoided. Surely sooner or later we will lose mother and father, and perhaps brothers and sisters. Eventually, husband and wife will face being separated by death from the love of their lives. Some parents among us may even lose a son or daughter while they themselves go on living. When that happens, their pain and grief is particularly acute, as children are not meant to die before their parents do.

To go on living and not just existing after the death of a loved one, we need to go through a period of mourning, in which we both remember what the loved one has meant to us and feel acutely the loss of their presence and company. Grieving like that may make us kinder and gentler afterwards to both ourselves and others.

Even *'Jesus wept'* and grieved. Maybe the sight of this poor sorrowing mother reminded him of the day that he and his own mother Mary followed the body of Joseph to his grave!

So while faith is a wonderful comfort and support at a time of death, it doesn't do away with the need to grieve. What it does do is let us grieve with hope – the hope that we will see our loved ones again.

In our times of grief and loss, Jesus, the Son of God, visits us as well. He, the Lord of life and death, feels the same compassion for us. And just as he awakened the young man of Nain to life on earth, we trust that he will use his divine power to awaken us and our loved ones to eternal life with him in heaven. This is because Jesus whom Scripture calls '*the resurrection and the life*' is for all who believe in him the source of everlasting life, comfort, joy and peace.

Let us console one another in our losses with this hope! It's a hope that is so powerful, that it will enable us in the midst of our grief to get on with our lives, just as God wants us to do.

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