

Luke 7:11-17

What do you say to a family when you stand with them next to the casket in which their loved one is lying? "I'm sorry?" "May God strengthen you?" How about, "Stop your crying! Do not weep!" It's what Jesus said to the mother whose son was being carried out for burial. How insensitive! All she has left are her tears. Her husband is dead, and now her only son has died. Why can't she cry? It's the only way she can deal with the terrible pain and sadness within her heart. Only a madman would tell a grieving widow to stop crying. Unless...unless that madman could give her a reason...a reason not to weep.

The world can give no such reason. Doctors can offer hope even when a patient is barely hanging on. A different medicine can be given, another surgery, a radical new treatment. But when the patient dies, all hope is gone. They unplug the machines, pull out the IV's, and direct the family to a quiet room where they can weep for their loved one. When someone has died, the best the world can offer is a shoulder to cry on.

There is a time for weeping, but that was not the day when Jesus came to the town of Nain. A funeral procession was already in motion. Sadness filled the air. All hope was gone. But Jesus is no mere doctor. He is the Great Physician who has power even over death. He stopped that procession with a touch of His hand, and He commanded the widow to stop her weeping. There was authority in His voice, but more than that, there was promise--the promise of what was to come. Nothing had changed with regard to the dead man. The widow's son was not miraculously showing signs of life. The power of death was as strong as ever. But everything had changed...for Jesus had come, and there was hope and promise in His words. "*Do not weep,*" He told the widow. And then He fulfilled His words to her. "*Young man,*" He said, "*I say to you arise.*" And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.

That widow's weeping came to a halt. Yet, her tears would have continued. But now they were tears of joy. The only one in all the world who could have done this for the widow was Jesus. No one else has power over death and the grave. No one else is the Lord and Giver of life.

It was not pure luck that Jesus happened to be heading into Nain that day. It was God's compassion that led Him there, just as it was His compassion, His mercy and promise that led Jesus to the font when you were baptized. You were that young man from Nain at that point in your life. We are born spiritually dead, the Bible says. "*Dead in our trespasses and sins.*" You were being carried along on the bier of sin and death, and there was nothing you could do to stop it. As that young man was unable to stop his funeral procession, so were you.

But what is impossible for men is possible for God. He stopped death dead in its tracks when He came to you in the water of Holy Baptism. And with His word, He called you out of death into life. The power of sin, death, and hell no longer held you in its grasp. In baptism--your town of Nain--Jesus raised you to life by forgiving your sins.

And then Jesus did one more thing...He gave you to your Mother. When He raised the young man from Nain, it says that He gave him to his mother. And so for you. Jesus, after raising you to life in baptism, gave you to your Mother, the church. You see, Jesus did not raise you from the death of sin in your baptism so that you would fall back into your sins and die forever. That's why He gave you to your Mother. Your Mother, the church, nourishes you in your life with Christ. Here you are sustained in your faith through the regular hearing of the Word of God, through the faithful reception of the

Sacrament of your Lord's body and blood, through the confessing of your sins and the receiving of the word of absolution. Without our spiritual mother to raise us in the faith, it wouldn't be long and we would be back on the bier of sin and death, being carried away and unable to stop the procession.

A few years back, a movie came out starring Bruce Willis entitled, "*The Sixth Sense*." In the movie, the main character is dead but he doesn't know it. He lives day after day not realizing that he died a long time ago. I've spoken to people like this, and so have you. People who are dead, but do not know it. When any of us fall away from the Faith by neglecting our Mother, we may recall the Bible stories we learned, we may remember Jesus' death and resurrection, but we are not being kept alive in Christ through His Word and His Sacraments. We live out our days believing ourselves to be alive, but spiritually we are dead. Not one of us can stop that bier. When sin controls us, we are powerless to halt the deadly procession.

That's why Jesus keeps returning to the town of Nain. He is full of compassion for sinners like us who are carried away--away from our Mother, away from His love, away from the hope of eternal life. Jesus stands here today and His hand is reaching out touching the bier upon which you are lying. And what is so comforting for us is that His hand is pierced; it was pierced for you.

Jesus, too, was once being carried away by death to a hill called Golgotha. But His Father in heaven sent no angel to stop that procession to the cross. His mother, Mary, also a widow, was weeping for her Son who was heading to His crucifixion. No one stopped her tears. No one put a halt to the impending death of the innocent Son of God. But it had to be this way, for in His death is your life. By His wounds you are healed. In His blood shed for you is forgiveness for all your sins.

God's compassion for you kept Him from halting His Son's funeral procession. And that same compassion puts out His hand to stop yours. Today, this very minute, Jesus stands before you. And no matter how long you have been lying on the bier of sin and death, no matter how far you have been carried away from your Mother, no matter how strong the stench of death, Jesus in love puts forth His pierced hand and He puts a halt to what sin has been doing to your heart and life. "I forgive you," He says to each and every one of you. You are released from your sins. Jesus makes it so. He took your sins away to a cross, therefore your sins cannot carry you away into Judgment.

Do not think that you can live in Christ apart from your Mother, for Jesus only deals with you through your Mother. And this is why you have a place here within your Mother, the church. Here is your true home. Here is your family. Here your Lord comes to you as He came to Nain. Here you are given the Holy Spirit, faith, peace with God, the forgiveness of your sins. Here you are given the assurance that you have a merciful God for the sake of Jesus.

Friend, one day your body will be lying on a bier. You will be in a casket with your family standing there. But what a joy for them to be able to cry, and yet not mourn; to have tears, but not to grieve without hope. For as you live your life now with your Mother, the church, being nourished by Word and Sacrament, trusting in your Lord Jesus Christ even to the day of your death, you will, one day, be carried away, but not on the bier of sin and death. You, a forgiven child of God, will be carried away by the pierced hands of Jesus into the arms of your heavenly Father. And you, from that day on, will never weep again. Amen.