

Luke 7:11-17

We do not know much about the town of Nain. We hear of it only because St. Luke writes of it in this chapter of his Gospel. We do, however, know a few things. People died in Nain, even young men. There were widows in Nain, and widows whose children were taken in death. Nain was a town that felt sadness, even great sorrow. And there were people of compassion in Nain, for our text says that a considerable crowd was with the widow as her only son was being carried out.

Nain sounds a lot like Augusta. They endured life's challenges with much struggle as we do. They faced sickness, pain, and death, and they helped each other through these difficult times as best they could. But there is a limit to our compassion. We can feel sympathy, even empathy, for others. But we cannot stop the flow of tears when death comes. The crowd from Nain was mourning with this widow, but they could not prevent the widow from mourning.

But then Jesus came. And here is the first time that St. Luke calls Him *the Lord*. "When the Lord saw the (widow), he writes, "He had compassion on her." This is significant. Day after day, year after year, the people of Nain did their best to help each other through pain and suffering. But all they could do was to put band-aids on the hurt and sorrow. Now comes He who is the Lord of life and death. His compassion has no limits. *Jesus' heart went out to the widow* is how the Greek actually reads. As Jesus approaches the gate of the city, no one stops Him and asks Him for help. No one addresses Him at all. What stops Him is His compassion. His heart is literally hurting for this woman. And so out of His mouth come the words: "Do not weep."

"Do not weep!" Who in their right mind would speak such words to a widow at the funeral of her only son! Why shouldn't she weep? Death has devastated her life. We've all stood in lines at funeral homes to greet friends who have lost loved ones. Sometimes we search for the right words: "I'm so sorry." "You have my sympathy." When a Christian dies, we can tell them that their loved one is in a better place. But have you ever told the bereaved to stop crying? "Dry your tears!" "Stop your weeping!" That would seem so cruel and heartless.

But these words from Jesus to the poor widow are just the opposite. For within this command there is promise and hope. Jesus is declaring to her, by these words, what He is about to do. For the only thing that can dry her tears is to have her son back from death.

And so He follows His words to her by touching the funeral stretcher...and everyone stops: the widow, the pallbearers, the crowd. We can picture the angels in heaven stopping what they're doing and turning to gaze down at this scene in wonder. We can picture all the demons holding their breath as they watch in horror. He who is Lord over life and over death now speaks - not to the widow, not to the crowd; He speaks to the dead man, to him who cannot hear, who cannot respond, who is not even aware of Jesus. "Young man, to you I say, arise." And the dead man sits up and begins to speak.

This was, without a doubt, the greatest thing that ever happened in Nain. I suppose this is where Nain and Augusta must part ways. Our town...your town may be like Nain in how we struggle with suffering and death; but Nain has us beat in overcoming death. Nothing like this has ever happened in our town. Or has it? Jesus speaks to a man who is dead and raises him to life. Someone who has no knowledge of Jesus; who is not even aware of Him, is claimed out of the clutches of death and is made alive. Friend, this happened to you when you were baptized. Jesus raised you from death to life by speaking to you in connection with the water.

Every time there is a Christian Baptism...everything stops. The angels in heaven look down in wonder, and all the demons look on in horror. There is no difference between the life Jesus gives in Baptism and the life He gave the young man from Nain; except that Baptism is greater, for it gives us a life that cannot die. That young man from Nain would again, one day, die. He would have a second funeral. But at your funeral, through the life you have in Christ in Baptism, your loved ones will rejoice even as they weep.

End of story? No. As soon as the young man is made alive, we're told: "*Jesus gave him to his mother.*" "Well of course," we think, "what's so interesting about that?" Everything. The young man's first move may have been to hug his mother. But Jesus now acts in love by giving him as a gift to his mother.

At one time he belonged to her. God gave him to his mother when he was born from her. But then death claimed him. "Until death us do part" is not just for married couples. Death separates every relationship, every bond here on earth. This young man belonged to his mother, but when he died his mother could no longer claim him. Now death claimed him. But Jesus steps in, pulls him away from death, and gives him life. And so now this young man from Nain belongs to Jesus, for Jesus claimed him out of death. And so how gracious and loving that Jesus gives this young man, as a gift, to his mother.

Do you see yourself in this story? You, too, were claimed by death, by sin, and by the devil himself. This is, according to Scripture, how each one of us is born into this world. But in Baptism, Jesus pulls you away from sin, death, and the devil, and claims you for Himself. But He does not immediately whisk you away into heaven. He gives you as a gift to your family for them to love you and raise you. And even more, He gives you, as He did here in Nain, to your mother - your mother, the church, to be nourished as only a mother can nourish, through her teaching, preaching, confessing, singing, growing in faith, receiving the blessed Sacrament.

But this is where we struggle. We value our independence. So much so, that we resist the claim of our mother on us. We become offended when the church urges us to become more involved. We don't take kindly to her call to look closely at our income and what we give out of that to the Lord. We don't think the church has a claim on us. God does, but not the church.

But these words have meaning for us: "*Jesus gave him to his mother.*" He did not tell that young man from Nain: "Now you're free to live your life." Not at all. He gave him to his *mother*. And for you, too. Jesus gave you to your mother, the church, when He raised you to life in Holy Baptism. When we resist our mother and her claim on us, we also resist the Lord who gave us to her. Jesus does not pass you off to your mother, but He cares for you through her; through the church.

All this is done in love. This story of Nain teaches this to us. The enemy here is not Jesus, or the mother; the enemy is death. But Jesus defeats death with a word from His mouth. Your enemy is not your mother the church, or the elders, or the other members, or the pastor. Your enemy wants you back. But Jesus defeats your enemy for you. He forgives your sin - that enemy which wants to reclaim you. He forgives you because He allowed sin to lay claim to Himself on the cross. Your sin, therefore, has no claim on you anymore. It cannot control you because your sin has been washed away.

Jesus gives you life in your Baptism, and power over the devil. Remind Satan each day that you are baptized into Christ. The devil cannot claim you anymore. And even when death lays claim to your mortal body, it cannot have your soul. And even your body will be raised to life on the Last Day.

The best thing that ever happened to Nain is that Jesus came to that town. And this is the best thing that ever happened to you. And not just once, but every time you are here, Jesus comes. He comes to stop the funeral stretcher that sin, death, and the devil are using to carry you away and reclaim you. He defeats these enemies of yours with a word from His mouth. He gives you life. And He gives you to your mother. Amen.