

**SERMON - On the Raising of the Son of the Widow of Nain - Luke 7:11-16, Sunday,  
October 7, 2018**

We often like to refer to the wondrous acts of our Lord, as they are recorded in the Gospels, as miracles. The word “miracle” implies some kind of spectacular, superhuman act or event which defies and transcends human reason, logic and scientific expectation. In today’s Gospel the word miracle is not mentioned even once. The description of today’s event, as told in today’s Gospel, only says that this was the Lord’s compassion, and that God had visited His people. The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) are replete with numerous descriptions of spectacular healings and events performed by our Lord. In St. John’s Gospel only seven such events are described, and St. John calls them “signs.” The significance of these events are not in the spectacularity of these events, but in the deeper, hidden meanings of changing water into wine, healing a paralyzed man, restoring sight to a blind man, feeding five thousand and walking on water. Therefore, the first thing that we must understand is that Jesus acts out of compassion, mercy and love. “I did not come to judge the world,” says Jesus, “but to save it.” Very few of us have the audience before God where we can call on God to heal the sick or raise the dead, or multiply five loaves and two fish and be able to feed five thousand hungry people. However, potentially, we all have the opportunity to unite ourselves with Christ to the point where, as St. Paul says, “it is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” This occurs through much effort (“this kind comes out only through prayer and fasting”), by humbling our egos and self-righteous pride, by struggling against evil inclinations and sin, and by cultivating a pure heart that judges no one except ourselves alone. When we have reached such a state in our lives, we can imitate our Lord by offering to our fellow human beings unconditional love, compassion and mercy. Co-suffering love, and offering compassion and mercy on the downtrodden and everyone, not distinguishing whether the person deserves mercy or not (perhaps they are suffering as a result of their own selfish sins and mistakes) is more spectacular and remarkable than any miracle. The second thing that we must understand is that Jesus wants our hearts. If Christ dwells in our hearts and our treasure is in God and not in earthly possessions or even human attachments, then we will live with complete faith and trust in God. We will see the image and likeness of God in ourselves by not defiling ourselves with sin, and we will see the face of God in others and show others unselfish love, compassion and mercy. We will live not for this life, but our hope will be in the next life, where there will no longer be any suffering, illness or death but eternal life. In the next world Satan will play no role and all evil will be cast out.

Few who are ill are miraculously healed in this life, and few who die will be raised from the dead in this life. And even if we should be healed from illness in this life, or raised from the dead in this life, it is all temporary, because one day we will become ill again, and one day we will die again, and this time our death will be permanent as we enter into the next world. Everyone who cultivates a deep faith in our Lord, everyone who lives a life of repentance, prayer and fasting will understand that perfect and complete healing and eternal life where there is no longer any suffering await all of us in the next life. If we have such a strong faith and belief, if we love the Lord with all our heart and mind, then we can find consolation in our grief when we face illness and death in this life, whether it be our own illness and death, or the illness and death of a loved one. That is the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian, between a believer and a non-believer. Jesus never promised or said that people would no longer get ill in this life or that people would no longer have to pass through the door of death before being able to enter into the next life. Yes, it is hard to be ill or to see a loved one suffer from illness. Yes, it is hard to lose a loved one whose time has come to leave this life. But our deep faith, hope and love for God should and will sustain us and give us strength, hope and understanding. If our faith is weak, if our love for God is weak, then we will respond with anger and blame God and ask “Why?” If our faith is strong and our love and trust in the Lord are the treasures of our hearts, then amidst our tears we will find hope, consolation and acceptance.

May we all grow in integrity as Christians, treating others as the Lord has treated us, and living out what we say we believe. May our lives become signs of Christ's salvation, living evidence of His victory over sin and death and of the power of His unfathomable love. May that same holy compassion that raised the son of the widow of Nain raise us, and others, into the blessed eternal life of the Kingdom. Amen.