

10<sup>th</sup> Sunday per Annum - C  
I Kings 17:17-24;  
Galatians 1:11-19;  
Luke 7:11-17  
Little Flower - 6/5/16

My Brothers and Sisters,

The Gospels contain many miracles of healing, including several where Jesus raised someone from the dead. A common denominator in most of these miracle stories was that either the person who was ill or someone else asked Jesus to heal the person. A second common denominator in most of these miracles was that Jesus asked for some kind of profession of faith on the part of the person asking.

The story of the widow of Nain is unique. Unlike most of the other miracles in the Gospels, no one asked Jesus to intervene. He intervened completely on his own initiative. Also, unlike most of the other miracles, since no one asked Jesus to intervene, he did not ask anyone for a profession of faith in him.

The obvious question is why did Jesus choose to intervene. The Gospel begins by telling us that the man who had died was the *“only son of his mother, and she was a widow.”* According to Luke, *“When the Lord saw her, he was moved with pity for her...”* In other words, Jesus was moved with compassion or mercy for the woman. St. Luke’s Gospel is sometimes called the Gospel of Compassion. On a purely human level, Jesus’ compassion makes perfect sense. Jesus himself was the only son of a widowed mother. At his crucifixion, Jesus demonstrated the same kind of compassion for his own mother when he entrusted her to his beloved disciple.

It seems to me that compassion has two dimensions. Compassion is, first, sensitivity to the real needs of others, both those that are expressed and those that remain unexpressed, and, second, responsiveness to those needs. On a very human level, Jesus felt with and for the widow who had lost her only son. He understood her grief and perhaps her dependence on her son. He then responded in the most appropriate way he could. As the Son of God made human, he had the unique power to call her son back to life, and he did so.

When Jesus raised the widow’s son, he revealed himself as the Compassion of God: *“...they glorified God, exclaiming, ‘A great prophet has arisen in our midst,’ and ‘God has visited his people.’”* The Gospel ends by telling us that *“this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and in all the surrounding region.”* As William Barclay wrote, “Jesus is not only the Lord of life; he is the Lord of death who himself triumphed over the grave and who has promised that, because he lives, we shall live also (Jn 14:19).”

In the sixth chapter of Luke’s Gospel, Jesus said, *“Be compassionate [or merciful] as your heavenly Father is compassionate [or merciful]”* [6:36; British JB, 1966]. Therefore, like Jesus, we are called to be sensitive and responsive to the real needs of others. Most of us can see the needs of people who are very much like us. However, many of us have a much harder time either seeing or caring about the needs of those who are very different from us or far away from us.

My brothers and sisters, Pope Francis has designated this year as an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy.” Our challenge is to be compassionate, to be sensitive, caring, and responsive not just to the needs of family and friends and people like us but also to the needs of people who are very different from us here in our own country and throughout the world. We need to be sensitive, caring, and responsive to suffering people throughout the world, whether from poverty, hunger, thirst, war, injustice, or disease. If we are compassionate, our compassion will reveal the face of God to others.