

Dearly beloved in Christ: Christ is in our midst!

Last Sunday's gospel ended with Jesus telling his disciples and us "Therefore be merciful just as your Father is merciful." Today Jesus shows how deep His mercy is, His compassion. Coming to Nain He is on His way in at the gate to teach the people living there and He is met by a procession going out of the city with a dead man. Not only a dead man but the only son of his widowed mother. Her husband dead and now she is left without the staff of her old age, her only son. Our Lord Jesus had compassion on her. This is not a superficial feeling sorry for someone but mercy that pours forth from deep within. Jesus shows mercy to her and her son as He confronts death and brings the young man back to life. He who is Life meets one held captive by death and frees him. We see in this a foreshadowing of the triumph over death that will come with the death and resurrection of our Lord. Seeing this the people cry out two things: "A great prophet has risen among us" as well as "God has visited His people."

"A great prophet has risen among us." There were many prophets throughout the history of Israel. But none had raised the dead since the time of Elisha. Moses, however, told the people of Israel this: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren -- him you shall heed." (Deuteronomy 18:15) Moses here was prophesying the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ who could behold God's face and speak with God because He is God made flesh. The people acclaim Jesus a prophet but they do not understand that He is also much more than a prophet. He doesn't speak in God's behalf but He speaks as God. This is connected to what the people also said, "God has visited His people."

The visitation of God is bringing salvation such as when He delivered the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt through His servant Moses. God acts with mercy and compassion. Sometimes it means deliverance such as for the widow's son in today's gospel. Other times it is as with St. Paul who was afflicted with a vision problem and God did not take it away but was with St. Paul through his suffering. But the great joy is that God has visited us not in a column of fire but as one of us. The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ fulfills the prophet Isaiah's words, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (which means, God with us). (Matthew 1:23) Our Lord Jesus Christ is "God with us" who has visited us and continues to visit us with His presence and His salvation.

As Jesus touched the stretcher carrying the young man and called him back to life so Jesus reaches out to us. He reaches out to us at baptism where we are united to Him. He reaches out to us in Confession where He washes away our sins. He reaches out to us in Holy Anointing for the healing of soul and body. He reaches out to us in the Holy Eucharist where He comes to enter us, the temple of our bodies, to forgive our sins and bring us to everlasting life with Him. He reaches out to us through the people we meet every day. Those persons close to us and those we may see only once in our lifetime. Wherever there are those who are hungry or thirsty, strangers, naked, sick or imprisoned there is Christ. Even in the people we may not like or who may not like us.

As often as we act with compassion, that is with deep-seated mercy, to another then we are being merciful to Christ in the manner that He is merciful to us. In that even though we are sinners, are unworthy, yet He calls us to follow Him. And not only does He call to us but He comes to us, He visits us, His people. He is in our midst wherever two or three are gathered together in His name. He is with us now and will come to us in the mystery of the Eucharist that we may become more like Him in mercy and compassion so that we may live in Him who is Life and Light and may bring others to the knowledge of the glory of God that we share in as much as we can on this earth until we share in its fullness in the Kingdom of Heaven.