

Date: October 25, 2020

Subject: 20th Sunday After Pentecost

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Thank God, our civil oppressors, will finally permit the Cathedral in SF to be open for Services this Sunday.

LUKE 7:11-16

And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people.

Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.

And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.

And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.

And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people.

This miracle that Jesus performed should make us think about two important concerns in our life: the role of mercy and the issue of life and death. Let us first look at the role of mercy.

It is due to God's infinite love and mercy that we have our lives. He created us, and gifted us with an eternal soul. He provides in great abundance everything that we want, need, and have. When we rejected Him through sin, His Son degraded Himself to become a man in order to redeem and reconcile us with the Father. The Savior died a completely unnatural death and resurrected in order to save us. He established His Church on earth to supply us with the Grace that enables us to become God-like. And, He promises us a blessed eternity that is so wonderful, human words cannot adequately describe it. All of this He does because He is infinite in mercy.

We, who are the recipients of this mercy, should be most grateful to Him and thank Him. How can we express our gratitude? By being merciful ourselves. While our need to be merciful is not a direct commandment, our Savior makes it clear that this is what He desires and expects from us. This desire is expressed in one of His Beatitudes: *Blessed art the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.* And He confirms this expectation by His personal example of human mercy when He resurrected the young man that we read about in Sunday's Gospel passage.

You might ask, why does God expect us to be merciful? Because being merciful is our way of expressing our love for other people. And that we must love everyone, even our enemies, is a commandment that we read about in last Sunday's Gospel passage. Therefore, if we truly desire to be saved, something that cannot be done without God's mercy, we must be merciful in our hearts and dealings with people. And if we are really honest, we will have to admit that it is not really so hard to do as we, innately, have this virtue in our hearts. All people, Christians or not, will show mercy at times. But we, the children of God, are expected to be perfect in it.

Now we can turn to the question of life and death. A unique gift that God gave to the human race was eternal life. We were created to live forever in blessedness together with our Creator. But humanity was permitted to choose whether or not we desired this. After sin, which separated us from God, our earthly

life became the means by which we make this choice. Bodily death then ends the time of choosing and transfers us into eternity.

During our earthly life, we choose by living our life in a way that leads to a blessed eternity or to eternal death. If we live according to God's commandments, we earn eternity. But if we do not, then, when we resurrect, we resurrect into permanent spiritual death. We all fear our bodily death, do our best to not think about it, and try to do everything possible to prolong our earthly life. But even if we are still bodily alive, but not living according to God's commandments, we are already in a state of spiritual death which will become permanent after our bodily death.

This last statement is very sobering because all of us sin and become separated from God. When that happens, we are then bodily alive and functioning, but spiritually dead. But even here, God extends to us His mercy. He offers us a way to escape from this condition and "resurrect" back to life. This way is through sincere repentance and by being reinstated back into spiritual life through confession, when the confessing priest reads over us the following words: *Reconcile and **unite** him/her to Thy Holy Church, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

However, even after we are reinstated into Jesus Christ's Body, we continue to repeat our sins. And even then, the Savior does not deny us His Mercy but will "resurrect" us each time, if we repent. The danger here, though, is that we don't know the hour of our death. Will we have the time to be "resurrected" before that hour strikes? Also, sinning can become so pleasurable and habit-forming, that we might not want to "resurrect" and will not repent. Then God's mercy, although still available, will be of no use, and the person will suffer eternally, both in body and soul, in eternal death.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our God truly loves us and wants to share eternity with us. He does everything possible to allow this to happen. But as we are told again and again, God cannot save us without our consent and cooperation. We must truly want to be saved. Then we need to deny the devil access into our lives and hearts and devote our earthly life to God and together with Him, do everything that He asks of us. If we do this, an indescribably blessed eternity will be ours.

With Much Love In Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar