

Date: October 23, 2021

Subject: 18th Sunday After Pentecost

My Dear Brothers and Sisters:

We are witnessing here a battle between autumn and winter. Winter is threatening us with the first freeze this Monday. But autumn is fighting back and refusing to drop all the colorful leaves still on the trees. In fact, some trees are very late and only starting to change their colors. Autumn will not abandon us without a fight.

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.

Presented here is one of the three cases of Jesus resurrecting a dead person that are discussed in detail in the Gospel. We also see Him resurrecting a twelve year old daughter of a synagogue leader. And we all know the details of the major resurrection story of Lazarus, who was resurrected after being four days in the tomb. But most important of all, of course, is the Lord resurrecting Himself. What is the Lord teaching us through these resurrection miracles?

One important lesson is the necessity of feeling compassion for suffering people. These miracles also teach that we need to not only feel compassion, but also do what we can to alleviate suffering. In the above case, *when the Lord saw her* (the mother), *he had compassion on her*. She was a widow. With the death of her only child, she was left completely alone and helpless in a society which had very little concern or care for the needs of women. Therefore, the Savior resurrected her son to allow him to care for her through her old age.

When Jesus resurrected the daughter of the synagogue leader, He felt the deep pain that parents feel when they lose a child. Therefore, he went without hesitation to resurrect her. He did this even though her father, Jairus, a leader of a synagogue, was a member of the ruling class, and as such, quite hostile to Jesus. Through this miracle, Jesus taught that we need to come to the aid of anyone who needs it, even if they are our enemy.

Finally, the story of Lazarus is so well-known by us that no further comment is needed.

But what is the most important thing that Jesus is telling us? He is reminding us that He is the master over both our life and death. He willed us to be born. He wills the hour when we will face the inevitable, our bodily death. That we all will die is undisputable. But when we die, and under what circumstances, is completely and only according to His divine will.

The Savior, being the all-knowing God, knows when it is the best time to call every person to transfer into eternity. When our time comes, there is nothing that we can do to prevent it from happening. If we understand that we have no control over when we die, why then is there so much fear of Covid?

Yes, this fear was understandable when the disease first appeared, and the effects of it were unknown. But why are the same drastic measures with little or no effect to stop the spread a year later still despotically forced on people? These restrictions have proven to be more damaging to people, both physically and spiritually, than the disease itself.

The fact that non-Orthodox people fell victim to this fear can be understood to some extent, as they do not have the full true teachings of Christ. But what is truly amazing and sad is that many Orthodox people also greatly submitted to this fear. This fear among the faithful resulted in our rejecting everything that our loving God gives us to protect us from disease.

Our churches were forceably closed, making access to sacraments, especially the healing sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion, greatly restricted and even unavailable. The fear that the Body and Blood of our Savior can in some way infect people appeared and grew. Because of this, measures, contrary to the ancient, canonically established means of receiving this most holy and healing mystery, were adopted. Access to holy icons, to which people usually run to for healing, was restricted or even banned. Most people were deprived of celebrating the Resurrection, Christ's victory over death! Even the sacrament, established exactly for the healing of the sick, Holy Unction, was cancelled in places. Most insulting of all, churches were declared to be non-essential, and many of us kept quiet.

A year later, people are still being forced submit to very dubious measures to control the spread of this virus. Social distancing is demanded, but strangely, only very selectively. Large gathering of people close to the those in power or those in power themselves are permitted, but forbidden to all else. Mandates that require masks that have no proven record of effectiveness are required. And now vaccinations are forced on people, and those who resist are punished. This, despite the fact that the vaccinations were not properly tested for safety and were developed using measures that are abhorrent to many for religious reasons.

When the disease first appeared, people started asking why God allowed it. Interestingly enough, I do not hear many people asking this question now. But they should, because our Church teaches us that God allows these kinds of disasters. He allows them to occur by turning away from people who, through their way of life, reject His presence. Respecting the free will of people, God steps aside, which frees the demonic forces to wreck havoc and torment people through their hatred of God and His creations.

All must realize and accept that it is we who have kicked out God out of our lives, We did this, desiring to enjoy life without the restrictions that He places on us for our salvation. If we deeply repent and bring Him back into our lives, He, being always most merciful, will stop this affliction. But if we don't, and even if Covid dies without our repentance, our freedom will only be temporary. A new and greater affliction will inevitably soon or later strike the world.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we, being Orthodox Christians, have a most important role to play, especially since this disease has revealed the very tenuous hold that some Orthodox have onto their faith. Being the chosen nation of God, the Orthodox people need to lead the way in this disaster. Compassion requires this of us. And it is not too difficult to accomplish. Each one of us can and should lead through our repentance, and become the scriptural beacons of light that bring people back to God. If we all begin to lead an exemplary Orthodox way of life, our example can have that kind of salvific effect on those around us.

With Much love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar