

**June 5, 2016 The Widow of Nain Homily:** Brothers and sisters, in the days of my youth, I witnessed an extraordinary event on television, so-called, “live” television: the funeral procession of President John Kennedy. On the day of the funeral, November 25th, 1963, I was only nine years old. The procession commenced at the White House and ended at the steps of St. Matthew's Cathedral in the nation's capital. The president's flag-draped coffin was pulled by four horses, including a rider-less horse, symbolizing the fallen commander-in-chief. Perhaps the most poignant moment of the day occurred outside the cathedral. The three year old son of the President, John Jr. saluted the coffin of his father. It was somber, solemn and truly unforgettable.

In today's gospel (Lk.7:11-17) we meet one of those countless funeral processions. The bier is just being carried out of the city gate. The evangelist informs his readers that the dead have no place in the land of the living. A grieving widowed mother has lost her only child, and her only means of economic support. Widowhood has left her vulnerable, unprotected and defenseless. And once again, we hear of Our Lord's compassion. "When the Lord saw her, he was moved with pity for her" (Lk.7:13). He grasps the misery and sorrow of a woman who is standing alone. His simple command "Arise" is all that is needed for the dead man "To sit up and speak" (Lk.7:15).

In the Christian vocabulary "arise" is used first of all for the resurrection. The miracle performed by Jesus anticipated the great event of the resurrection on Easter Sunday. In his reflections on today's gospel, the Archbishop of Vienna, Christoph Schonborn, writes the following: “Is not the whole story of mankind a long, endless funeral procession. Thousands of people are carried to their graves every day. Everywhere there is mourning, which is often heart breaking.”

Nevertheless, all our funeral processions do not come to an end at the grave. One's journey has not ended. He is simply on the way. As Jesus wiped away the tears of the widow of Nain, so he promises to wipe away our tears when we suffer the loss of one dear to us.

Here the Latin expression, "Memento mori" is particularly relevant. It can be translated "Remember that you have to die". All the great saints of the church were ever-mindful of the profundity of these bracing words. All of us know that we are moving toward death. It is the way of all mankind. But let us recall the words of Christ: “This is the will of the Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have eternal life and I shall raise him on the last day” (Jn. 6:30).

The story recorded in Luke's gospel must have been very comforting for those early Christians who were subjected to unrelenting persecution and even death for the sake of Christ. For the believer, death does not have the final word. And that's why the gospel is indeed the Good News.

Amen!