

The Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
June 10, 2016

Today's Gospel account is another example of how Jesus saw a grief-stricken human being and matches that person's feelings with his own.

When Jesus saw the widow who had lost her only son, we are told he was "moved with pity" and told her, "Do not weep." Then, Luke tells us, "He stepped forward and touched the coffin" before commanding the young man to "arise." We are next told that he "gave him to his mother."

Notice, though, that Jesus not only showed incomparable gentleness, but that he asked no questions, expressed no concerns about the widow's past and made no demands that she follow any particular commands or laws in the future. Jesus simply responded to the enormity of this woman's pain, and he healed, he liberated, he created new life.

One quality found in all of Jesus' miracles is that they are always prompted by compassion and are never intended to highlight Jesus as a miracle worker. Instead, they are to be seen as signs that the new world God is trying to create, the Kingdom, is taking place right now.

As a rule, Jesus did miracles in response to a request for help. Jairus petitions Jesus to heal his daughter, and Lazarus's sisters send to Jesus for help when Lazarus is dying. But no one asked Jesus for help in the case of the widow's son we just heard about.

In this unusual case, Jesus sized up the situation without anyone's telling him anything about the weeping woman or her son. Somehow he seemed to know that she was a widow and that this was her only child; and he is moved with pity for her.

Without anyone's recognizing who he was, or asking him for anything, or showing any

sign of faith in him, Jesus quietly initiated the miracle and raised the dead man. Why did he do that?

One reason certainly has to do with his understanding of how destitute the poor widow's life would become because she had neither a husband nor a son to support her. Widows without a male child to care for her would be left entirely on her own for survival.

Maybe when he saw the widow heartbroken over the death of her only son, the situation of his own mother pierced his heart. We don't know who was in that large crowd accompanying Jesus to Nain, but his mother did travel with him from time to time.

Maybe Mary was there with him... Jesus is her only son too, and she is also a widow when Jesus died. Then she will be heartbroken and weeping for her only son. In his humanity, the weeping widow of Nain may move Jesus to compassion not only for her but also for his own mother.

Now this is pure speculation of course, but maybe, just maybe, Jesus initiated this miracle to comfort both these women.

Maybe he hoped that when his own mother was weeping for him at the foot of his cross, her memory of his restoring the son of the widow of Nain would come to mind. If that's true, then his love for Mary is also a part of this miracle.

The story of the widow's son, then, is another reminder of the kind of God Jesus revealed in his ministry, the same figure who had been active throughout the entire history of the Jewish people.

Acting with compassion for the widow and her son, Jesus revealed that our God is a God who rescues, who frees, who feels the pain of his people, who has entered history to save them.

This is why St. Paul in today's second reading describes how God mercifully intervened in his life and how he was completely transformed in the process. He went from being Saul, persecuting the followers of Jesus, to Paul, a new man "in Christ."

So as we are nourished by the Eucharist today, let's remember that God is calling us to the same transformation. We are to be like him. We are to feel the pain of others. We are to assist in the bringing about new life wherever we can.