

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost C (6/6/10 – *Christ Raises Us from Death to Life*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

This text brings back memories. It was on this text that I prepared my first sermon at the seminary 22 years ago – in Homiletics I. It is a wonderful text with which to begin this *Non-Festival* half of the Church Year – the *Time of the Church ... or Ordinary Time*. It has everything in it ... lots of people ... and especially lots of contrasts – sadness and joy, mourning and gladness, despair and elation, fear and jubilation, motion and stillness. But above all, we see today in this account the contrast of death and life.

Did you pay attention to the Procession this morning – take notice? There was nothing different – but it is so very meaningful ... reminiscent of the contrasts in our *Gospel*. Consider our Processional Crucifix. When we have a procession, I usually note that it serves to remind us of Christ coming into our midst with His gifts of forgiveness, **life**, and salvation. What we see on that Processional Cross is a depiction of our Lord's Crucifixion – His death. And yet, what we have received from His death and His Resurrection on the Third Day – what we receive here – is true and lasting eternal **life**! What we see is death; but through that death – indeed, in spite of it – the Lord Jesus Christ brings forth life. And that is exactly what we have going on in the *Holy Gospel* appointed for this *Second Sunday after Pentecost*.

As I said, this text brings back memories – for most of us ... except perhaps the youngest. And some of those memories are not very pleasant. We understand – all too well – why that widowed mother is weeping. She had lost her husband ... and now she has lost her only son. A spouse, we rather expect to lose ... sometime. It is rare that both die together. One will have to go on somehow in this life without the other – sad but true. Not a prospect we like to think about – much less see ... even among our friends and acquaintances ... let alone in our own lives. And now to lose her only son on top of it – perhaps even her only child the text seems to imply! Well, that is too much – especially when we consider the era and circumstances. This widow is very probably bereft of any means of support. She will have

to go out and glean from the corners of the fields – like Ruth had to do in the Old Testament ... but Ruth was a relatively young woman. We understand her weeping – she has good reason. She has very nearly lost everything. She is not unlike Job – though on a smaller scale ... yet just as devastated.

Everywhere we turn in our lives, we seem to see death – either outright ... or at the very least its earnest beginnings in illness and disease – in those we love ... and in ourselves. And the older one gets, the more frequently it seems to raise its ugly, unwelcome head. God said it would be so – in the beginning ... when He commanded Adam and Eve **not** to eat from the forbidden tree lest they die. But ate they did ... and die we do. In fact, the death that has entered because of sin – sin that you and I both share in ... from the moment we were conceived until our very last breath – the death we have inherited and deserved because of our own sins is twofold. There is *physical* death – what we see in our *Gospel* today ... the end to this earthly life that awaits all of us alike without regard to race, creed, education, or social status. And then there is also *spiritual* death – from which we **all** likewise suffer and would die **eternally** ... unless *Christ Raises Us from Death to Life*.

We are confronted almost constantly with death – even in the midst of life. Death and life are contending continuously – in our world in general ... and in our own personal existences in particular. We can ignore it when we are young. We can try to pretend it is not so when we are older ... middle-aged even. But it is relentless – this death – and is voracious in its pursuit. And whenever and wherever it shows up, it brings with it pain and suffering, guilt and fear, tears and mourning – just like we see in our *Holy Gospel* text.

But let's go back to the procession ... and the great contrasts we see in this wonderful Word of Scripture set before us. We have coming out of that little town of Nain a considerable crowd – as a young man is carried out on the funeral bier to the cemetery. His widowed mother is at his lifeless side – weeping in deep grief and mourning for the loss of her son ... her **only** son. In fact, the Greek says that he was her *only-begotten son* [LK 7.12]. But coming into town – with His disciples and a great crowd – is Jesus, the Lord

of life. And when He Who is the Author of Life looked upon that widowed and now son-less mother, *when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.”* [7.13] Or more precisely: *stop weeping ... cease weeping.* Death and life are contending here.

Now when the Lord commands, He Himself provides what is necessary to fulfill that command. So *He came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still* [7.14]. They stop because Jesus has broken protocol. Touching anything that touched the dead rendered one unclean – and it took special ceremonial cleansing and a waiting period of seven days before one could enter the temple again. Typically only the bearers – and the grieving family and closest friends – would have been willing to bear that uncleanness. But the Lord of Life has not come in our flesh to keep Himself separate from us. Quite the contrary, just as His becoming Man shows how much our God loves us and desires to come to us where we are, so also Jesus’ touch here shows that He has made Himself one with us ... and with our lot.

He will do much more than just touch death. He will **bear** our death in His body ... and **die our death for us** ... on the Cross – so that, in a great exchange, we might receive from Him His very life! And we see the beginning of this blessed exchange already here in our *Gospel* today – early in our Lord’s earthly ministry. Here before the eyes of faith, we see death and life contending. Death has seemingly won the day – the poor woman has lost both her husband and now her only-begotten son. But **the** Only-Begotten Son of God brings with Him life and immortality – indeed, **is** Life and Immortality itself ... dwelling in our flesh. He comes and touches the bier – and joins Himself yet again to the weakness and infirmity and death of our mortal flesh. He Who is the **only** Clean One makes Himself the ultimate **unclean** One, taking into Himself not only our weakness and infirmity and death ... but also **all** of our sin – both great and small ... public and secret ... known and unknown. And then He will bear it all away to His own grave – by way of His Cross. He will bear it in His body – our sin. And the Father will judge **our** sin in His Only-begotten Son – and consume **our** sin in His righteous wrath as it is poured out upon His Son ... Who willingly gives His

life as ransom for us all.

But on the Third Day the Lord of Life snatched life back from death – His Own life ... **and ours**. What we see happening here in our *Holy Gospel* is a foretaste of the Resurrection – and is directly tied to it. When Jesus says: *Young man, I say to you, arise* [7.14] and *the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother* [7.15], it is by the power of His Own rising from death and the grave ... after taking away the sting of death: namely, sin [1COR 15.56].

In a line from his wonderful Easter hymn, Luther describes what we see in our text and in Christ's Own death and Resurrection this way:

*It was a strange and dreadful strife / When life and death contended; /  
The victory remained with life, / The reign of death was ended. /  
Holy Scripture plainly saith / That death is swallowed up by death, /  
Its sting is lost forever. / Alleluia!* [LSB 458.4].

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! It seems to me that the *Gospel* we have for today is a most wonderful way to transition from the *Festival Season* – especially *Eastertide* and our celebration of the Holy Spirit's continuing work to apply to us Christ's Cross and Resurrection – to this *Time of the Church*. Here we see that we are "Resurrection People." We are people whose whole life is tied to Jesus' Resurrection. The strife between death and life is going on all around us ... and in our very own lives. Life and death are contending – in us. Our flesh is easily convinced that death will win the day – and so it gives in to sin's alluring call too easily ... as if we should just *eat and drink* since we will die [1COR 15.32]. But Life – our Lord Jesus Christ – has contended for us ... and has **already** won the battle ... once and for all! And here in this place the Lord of Life comes to you where you are in life – with all your sin and death. He comes to you ... has compassion on you ... touches you ... and speaks to you life-giving words: *Young man ... young woman ... I say to you, arise*. Your sins are forgiven. Christ's holiness, righteousness, and **life** are yours – now and forever.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]