

BIBLICAL PAGES

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**Jesus,
a man of His time and space,
shows us our true and full humanity**

Lectio n° 7 Get up!

Introduction

The episode of Lk 7:11-17 is not related by the other gospels. The narration highlights Jesus' power as well as His mercy. There is no request, prayer or faith on the part of those who feel utterly lost and are no more capable of requesting, praying or believing. But Jesus helps them all the same.

Of course, in the Gospel, Jesus performs a miracle when someone has faith and begs Him to do it. So, in a way, miracles take place if we take the initiative. Here, on the contrary, Jesus does not receive any request: He Himself takes the initiative, moved to compassion by the tears of the woman, a widow and a mother. In fact, Jesus' attention is captured by this woman's condition and, consequently, He intervenes in order to alleviate her sorrow for the death of her only child. His mercy is attracted by our misery. When Jesus sees, is moved to compassion and draws near the dead or the suffering, He is the image of the merciful God, who feels compassion for man, His lost son.

In fact, Jesus' arrival is unexpected. Apparently He is wandering but He arrives where His presence is needed. He is a pilgrim and knows where He has to go, because mercy moves Him towards misery.

Let us invoke the Holy Spirit:

Lord, we thank You
because You have gathered us in Your presence
so that we may listen to Your Word:
You reveal Your love in it
and You make us know Your will.
We beseech You, may any other voice
different from Yours keep silence,
and do not let us be condemned
for Your Word read but not welcomed,
meditated upon but not loved,
prayed but not cherished,
contemplated but not put into practice.
Send Your Holy Spirit

to open up our minds
and to heal our hearts.
Only thus our encounter
with Your Word
will be a renewal of the Covenant,
communion with You and Your Son
and Your Holy Spirit,
God blessed in the Age of Ages.
Amen.

(Community of Bose)

1. Lectio **(to read the Word / to listen to it)**

Luke 7:11-17

11 It happened that soon afterwards He went to a town called Nain, accompanied by His disciples and a great number of people. 12 Now, when He was near the gate of the town there was a dead man being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a considerable number of the townspeople was with her.

13 When the Lord saw her He felt sorry for her and said to her, ‘Don’t cry.’ 14 Then He went up and touched the bier and the bearers stood still, and He said, ‘Young man, I tell you: get up.’ 15 And the dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him to his mother. 16 Everyone was filled with awe and glorified God saying, ‘A great prophet has risen up among us; God has visited His people.’ 17 And this view of His spread throughout Judaea and all over the countryside.

- Let us read the text more than once, slowly and making a pause each time...
- Let us go into the text's depths.

Jesus sets out towards Nain, a town whose name means ‘delights’. Jesus is going there together with His disciples and a huge crowd, all those who have already seen many of Jesus’ miracles.

We can read this passage highlighting its internal structure and its core: Jesus’ gaze on the widow who is also a mother, and His being moved to compassion by the woman’s tears.

Let us call back to mind that this episode, related by St Luke, refers us back to two episodes from the Old Testament: Elijah raising to life the widow’s son at Zarephath (1 K 17:17-24); and Elisha raising to life the son of the Shunammite (2 K 4:32-37).

1. Introduction (Lk 7:11-12a)

11 It happened that soon afterwards He went to a town called Nain, accompanied by His disciples and a great number of people. 12 Now, when He was near the gate of the town...

The texts begins by detailing time and place. Time is “soon afterwards”, that is, afterwards the cure of the servant of the centurion (Lk 7:1-10), whose faith was deemed “great” by Jesus; the place is the “town called Nain”.

In Hebrew, ‘Nain’ means ‘beautiful / loveable / delightful’. This was due to its favourable position which made it a wealthy and important town in Jesus’ times.

Set on the borders of Galilee, just a few hours walk from Nazareth (Nazareth being some 10 kilometres away southeastwardly), it was not far from the springs of the River Kison which from Mt Tabor flows into the Hesdrelon valley. From Nain’s high position the view was huge and majestic: on one side Nazareth’s mountains, on the other side Mount Carmel and in the background Mt Tabor.

Nain was not very far from Shunam where Elisha the prophet raised a boy to life (2 K 4:18-37), in the same way as Elijah did at Zarephath after invoking the Almighty (1 K 17:17-24).

Then there is a further note: “near the gate of the town”. None of the ancient travel reports dealing with Nain speaks of walls. Therefore the “gate” must have been the place where the road entered the town. In the biblical context, the term “gate of the town” referred to the place where meetings of the elders with the people took place, in various occasions of social life.

2. Exposition (Lk 7:12b)

...there was a dead man being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a considerable number of the townspeople was with her.

Here, few words are enough to present a tragic situation: “A dead man... the only son of his mother, and she was a widow”.

A cortege going out of the town. According to the Jewish customs of the time, funerals used to take place at dusk, as to highlight the passing from the light of life to the darkness of death. Cemeteries were usually out of town, at about 185 metres from the walls. The cortege was so composed: first the flute-players; then men, barefooted and with their heads covered by mantles; then the dead man in the coffin carried on shoulders; after the coffin, the mother and all the women, plus the lamenting women crying aloud and shouting the dead man’s praises. The corpse used to be laid on a wooden board and was covered by a linen cloth. It used to be carried to the cemetery by men. Once there, it was placed into the bare soil. A tomb stone signalled its presence. On it, the dead man’s relatives used to place stones.

On the other side, Jesus was coming forward surrounded by His disciples and followed by the crowd.

Here we find two processions: Jesus was in the first one, and He was carrying the joyful news of the Kingdom of God. In the second one, there was a dead man carried to the tomb by a huge crowd. He was not a nondescript dead man, but a young man “the only son of his mother, and she was a widow”. This detail invites us to take into consideration the context: a son could be the one and only wealth of a poor widow and would grant her a serene elderly age. The relationship between the two was vital to their survival.

The two crowds meet. The one following Jesus is joyful and cheerful for the hope aroused by the Good News. The other one is contemplating death in its most lacerating condition, of a young son taken away from his mother.

By the power of His words, Jesus is drawing His crowd towards the light leading to grace; while the other procession is carrying a corpse to the place of darkness and silence. On the dusty road of Nain the two crowds are one in front of the other, staring at each other as if exchanging their respective messages of life and death.

3. The core (Lk 7:13-15)

13 When the Lord saw her He felt sorry for her and said to her, ‘Don’t cry.’ 14 Then He went up and touched the bier and the bearers stood still, and He said, ‘Young man, I tell you: get up.’ 15 And the dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him to his mother.

Line 13. It all starts with Jesus' gaze to the mother and not to the dead son. This gaze arouses Jesus' compassion. Jesus is moved to compassion: death is not an evil event for the dead man, but for those who survive him.

However, first of all, let us highlight the different actions and details involved in this passage. Jesus goes towards this town; then He draws near its gate; here He is walking in order to draw near to us. We are usually drawing near to Him (eg the sick). Here, on the contrary, He is drawing near to us, given that a dead man cannot draw near to anybody. He is drawing near to us in our death.

Then the Lord sees. We can say that God has feet and eyes. And then Jesus is moved to compassion. We can say that the Lord has a heart and bowels. What guided Him while walking on His path, as well as His eyes, is His heart, compassion to man, to each and every man who is mortal.

In addition to that, we must highlight also that here in this text we find the first occurrence of the title ‘Lord’, ‘Kyrios’, which translates the sacred tetragram JHWH, that is, God’s name. Jesus is Lord especially because He sees and is moved to compassion. “He felt sorry” translates the Greek term ‘splagchnizein’, which denotes the moving of the bowels, of God’s maternal bowels. Compassion is the most fundamental of God’s features. His bowels move, when He sees our evil actions. He feels it Himself in His depths. Compassion is the highest of God’s features. Each and every one of His deeds originates from His compassion.

The Old Testament makes use of two different terms when it has to deal with compassion. ‘Hesed’, which means ‘tenderness’, ‘goodness’, ‘love as a gift’, ‘grace’, ‘faithfulness’; and ‘rachamim’, which is already present in the word ‘rechem’ and means ‘womb’, ‘motherly love’.

“...and said to her”. The Lord has feet, eyes, a heart and a mouth. Exactly the opposite of the idols that have feet but cannot walk, hands but cannot touch, eyes but cannot see, mouths but cannot speak. In addition to that, Jesus has a heart who is capable of being moved to compassion. And He says, “Don’t cry!”

Jesus sees the mother, hears her crying and stops, then uttering a word which may not seem appropriate to the situation: “Don’t cry!” The cortege stops too and they are all stunned and cannot believe their ears. How can one be so cruel to forbid a mother to lament the death of her son?

Someone is moved to compassion and talks to the widow... Then everybody keeps silent and a very unusual command resounds in the air, a command that nobody apart from Jesus would have dared to utter.

This command immediately dries up her tears. The Lord has shed tears Himself on more than one occasion. He shed tears over Jerusalem, doomed to destruction because they did not recognize their Lord and His coming. When one does not welcome ‘life’, he will die. Jesus sheds tears also over our death. He knows what crying means, and therefore He can say, “Don’t cry!” His tears dry up our own tears, as He has shared our own fate in everything: He entered human life and underwent death, so that we can have life... That is why He can say “Don’t cry!”

Line 14. Jesus makes a further step forward: “He went up and touched the bier and the bearers stood still”. This gesture of His leaves both processions speechless.

According to the Old Testament, touching a bier would make one impure, and uncleanness, according to what the rabbis used to teach, was more contagious than holiness (cf Nb 19:11-14, 16-22).

This gesture highlights Jesus’ hand touching the bier, while His mouth says: “Young man, I tell you: get up”. This is a solemn formula. It is the second of Jesus’ commands. The first one was addressed to the mother; this one is addressed to the dead man, ordering him to get up: ‘eghertheti’, ‘be raised to life’. ‘Egheiro’ is the typical verb the gospels use to denote the paschal resurrection. The English translation (“get up”) impoverishes the concept of being raised to life that we find in Greek, which is the same that will be used later on for Jesus’ resurrection. It is God’s creative Word, clarifying that death is not the definitive word of creation. The definitive Word is the one that “was in the beginning”, that gave life and that raises back to life.

This resurrection of the only son of the widow is described in details, highlighting all of Jesus’ feelings and deeds, in order for us to understand a very fundamental thing: we are no longer under the rule of either ‘death’ or ‘fear of death’. Death is no longer death but communion with the Lord of Life.

In the Book of Genesis we can read that “God said”, and things came into being (cf Gn 1). Here the Lord speaks and awakes the dead man. He comes back to being because he can listen to people speaking to him and he can talk himself. It is like a new creation, of the kind we find in the First Letter of St John: “We are well aware that we have passed over from death to life because we love our brothers” (1 Jn 3:14). As we see, Jesus’ word is heard, welcomed and passed on: this is the relationship among the living.

Line 15. “And the dead man sat up and began to talk...” The dead man was lying and now he is sitting on the bier, over death, as a conqueror of death. The first thing he does is talking, as a sign that life has gone back in him. Not being able to talk, being silent, is the condition of the dead. Death is equal to silence. If we do not talk, we are like “those who sink into oblivion” (Ps 28:1). The real death is not being able to communicate, the opposite of communion.

“...and Jesus gave him to his mother.” The mother who begot him receives a living being, not a dead man. Pay attention to the verb used in Greek, which means also ‘to give as a gift’. Therefore the son is given as a gift to this woman

for the second time, and she receives him as if she was giving him birth anew. In this life we can be given back to the mother, to our relationships: we can talk, dialogue, communicate, live, love one another.

Jesus' Word gives us back to the mother, and we are alive. This happens so that we may go back to the everyday lives death put an end to.

4. Conclusions (Lk 7:16-17)

16 Everyone was filled with awe and glorified God saying, ‘A great prophet has risen up among us; God has visited His people.’ 17 And this view of His spread throughout Judaea and all over the countryside.

The end of the passage relates the impression made by the miracle on the onlookers (line 16) and then on the whole people of Israel (line 17). These two last lines highlight the reactions of the crowd in the background.

When the event takes place in front of their eyes, they are all filled with awe, which is different from fear, as they glorify God for the great deed He has just performed. They glorify the God of life, because the glory of God is the living man. “A great prophet has risen among us”, a prophet equal to Moses, the prophet promised for the last times, when the Lord would have visited His people Himself. This great prophet has already risen and is in our midst. “God has visited His people”. Even nowadays God is visiting us through Jesus, who has got feet walking towards us, eyes to see our evil, heart and bowels of compassion for us, mouth to console us, hands to touch our death... and is the powerful Word that can raise us up.

Line 17 ends the passage by saying that “this view of His spread throughout Judaea and all over the countryside”, thus enlarging the horizons. We can translate this sentence thus: “This word spread out throughout Judaea and the whole region”. This event, this word, spread Jesus’ fame beyond the walls of Nain, and also beyond the borders of the region... And along the centuries has reached us here, now, so that we can read it and listen to it...

2. Meditatio **(to meditate on the Word / to let it resound)**

- After reading the text, let the Word resound in our hearts... Jesus’ gaze sees our own sorrows and, by penetrating into their depths, saves us, frees us, raise us back from all our ‘deaths’.

3. Oratio **(to pray the Word / to repeat it)**

Jesus, we bless You and we give You praise
because You are Mercy coming to meet our misery,
You are goodness and tenderness of the Father
coming to visit us as a sun that rises from above.
You who at Nain transformed the tears of a mother into joy,

console all those who are crying,
give strength to the sick, remember all those who are left alone
and excluded from society.
You vanquished death not only by touching a corpse
but dying Yourself and coming back to life
and living in the fullness of life for ever,
first fruit of all of us who will be raised back to life in You.
You are the Living One
and man that You call to communion with You
is necessarily a living one too.
Do give us a heart capable of not being indifferent,
but able to be moved to compassion when seeing the others' sufferings,
a living heart to alleviate the sufferings and sorrows
of all those that we meet on our path.
Amen.

4. Contemplatio **(to contemplate the Word / silence)**

- In silence... we turn our inner sight to the One who spoke to us in the Beloved Son. May we be filled with gratitude, as we have been reached there, in the depth, in the Sheol of our humanity which may be at times wounded, hit and humiliated...

5. Collatio **(to share the Word)**

- In order for the Word to become incarnate in our very lives, let us share it with the Sisters...