

Historic Commentary



(The Third Sunday of Trinitytide - Year C)

The Liturgy Letter

Commentary on Luke 7:11-17

(Selections from Church Fathers and John Calvin)

*Compiled by the Rev. Eric Dirksen.

Cyril of Alexandria: Observe how he joins miracle to miracle. In the former instance, the healing of the centurion's servant, he was present by invitation, but here he draws near without being invited. No one summoned him to restore the dead man to life, but he comes to do so of his own accord. He seems to me to have purposely made this miracle also follow upon the former.

Ephrem the Syrian: The Virgin's son met the widow's son. He became like a sponge for her tears and as life for the death of her son. Death turned about in its den and turned its back on the victorious one.

Cyril of Alexandria: The dead man was being buried, and many friends were conducting him to his tomb. Christ, the life and resurrection, meets him there. He is the Destroyer of death and of corruption. He is the One in whom we live and move and are. He is who has restored the nature of man to that which it originally was and has set free our death-fraught flesh from the bonds of death. He had mercy upon the woman, and that her tears might be stopped, he commanded saying, "Weep not." Immediately the cause of her weeping was done away.

Cyril of Alexandria: Christ raised him who was descending to his grave. The manner of his rising is plain to see. "He touched," it says, "the bier and said, 'Young man, I say unto thee, arise.' " How was not a word enough for raising him who was lying there? What is so difficult to it or past accomplishment? What is more powerful than the Word of God? Why then did he not work the miracle by only a word but also touched the bier? It was, my beloved, that you might learn that the holy body of Christ is productive for the salvation of man. The flesh of the almighty Word is the body of life and was clothed with his might. Consider that iron when brought into contact with fire produces the effects of fire and fulfills its functions. The flesh of Christ also has the power of giving life and annihilates the influence of death and corruption because it is the flesh of the Word, who gives life to all. May our Lord Jesus Christ also touch us that delivering us from evil works, even from

fleshly lusts, he may unite us to the assemblies of the saints.

Cyril of Alexandria: Let it be known to people everywhere that the Lord is God, and even though he appeared in a form like us, yet has he given us the indications of a godlike power and majesty on many occasions and in a multitude of ways. He drove away diseases and rebuked unclean spirits. He gave the blind their sight. Finally, he even expelled death itself from the bodies of men, death that cruelly and mercilessly had tyrannized humankind from Adam even to Moses, according to the expression of the divine Paul. That widow's son at Nain arose unexpectedly and wonderfully. The miracle did not remain unknown to everyone throughout Judea but was announced abroad as a divine sign, and admiration was upon every tongue.

Augustine: The widowed mother rejoiced at the raising again of that young man; of men raised again in spirit day by day does Mother Church rejoice. He indeed was dead in the body, but they in soul. His visible death was bewailed visibly; their death invisible was neither enquired into nor perceived. He sought them out who had known them to be dead; He Alone knew them to be dead, who was able to make them alive. For if the Lord had not come to raise the dead, the Apostle would not have said, "Rise, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." You hear of one asleep in the words, "Rise, thou that sleepest;" but understand it of one dead when you hear, "And arise from the dead." Thus they who are even dead in the body are often said to be asleep. And certainly they all are but asleep, in respect of Him who is able to awaken them. For in respect of thee, a dead man is dead indeed, seeing he will not awake, beat or prick or tear him as thou wilt. But in respect of Christ, he was but asleep to whom it was said, "Arise," and he arose forthwith. No one can as easily awaken another in bed, as Christ can in the tomb.

John Calvin: The reason which induced Christ to restore the young man to life was, that he saw the widow bereft of her only son, and had compassion on her: for he did not withhold his favor till someone requested it, as he did on other occasions; but anticipated the prayers of all, and restored the son to his mother, by whom nothing of this sort was expected. We have here a striking emblem of his freely bestowed compassion in raising us from death to life. By touching the coffin he intended perhaps to show, that he would by no means shrink from death and the grave, in order to obtain life for us. He not only deigns to touch us with his hand, in order to quicken us when we are dead, but, in order that he might raise us to heaven, himself descends into the grave.

John Calvin: A sense of the divine presence must have brought fear along with it: but there is a difference between the kinds of fear. Unbelievers either tremble and are dismayed; or, struck with alarm, murmur against God: while devout and godly persons, moved by reverence, willingly humble themselves. Fear, therefore, is here taken in a good sense, because they gave the honor which was due to the power of God which they had beheld, and rendered to God not only homage, but thanksgiving.