

✠ Luke 7:11-17 ✠

**IN NOMINE IESU**

It is true what we often hear at funerals: it is in God's hands. He is in control. It is true and there is some comfort here. Since it is in God's hands the death of our loved one is not our fault. If God is in control then we needn't worry nor feel guilty. We can be at peace knowing that our loved ones are safely in God's hands even when we are in the midst of tragedy and loss.

It is true, but it is hard to hear. If God is in control, if it's in His hands, why do our loved ones suffer and die? Why doesn't Jesus return already and end this age of tears and sorrow and pain? It often seems that God is in control like a child who finds a twisted pleasure in burning ants and torturing crickets; that He is arbitrary and cruel, enjoying watching us weep and lament the trials and sorrows of this life.

All people, from kings to paupers, have felt the sting of death. Everyone has mourned the death of someone they loved. Everyone has wondered why God's hand is so heavy upon them. Surely the widow of Nain wondered what she had done to deserve losing both her husband and now her child. She must surely have prayed what every parent prays: that she would take the place of her child. That she would die and her child would live.

But you can't take another's place. You can't die for your parents or spouse or child. You can't have cancer so that you loved one is spared cancer. No matter how much you want to, you can't have your heart broken so that your child escapes the pain of a broken heart. You can't take another's place. And even if you could, even if you could barter with your life for the life of your wife or child, it would only be for a moment. For death comes to all the children of Adam. It is the devil's chariot and he rides it as a thief.

The devil seeks to steal what God gives: life. He stole the widow's husband from her and now he has stolen her only-begotten son, and soon he will come for her just as he comes for your loved ones and for you. And so we weep. We weep as this widow wept for her son. We weep as Jesus wept for Lazarus. And we cry as much for the one we lay to rest as we do for our own pain. Our desire to take our loved one's place in sickness, death, and heartache so that they wouldn't have to suffer so, is as much a desire to be rid of the pain such things cause us. We don't want our child's heart broken because it brings us much pain. But death leaves no one unscarred. It leaves no one untouched. And for a time it seems as if the enemy has the upper hand. It seems as if death has won. Death is the hour of evil and the power of darkness.

But death has not won. It only seems that way. For there comes to meet the crowd that followed death out of Nain, One whose chariot is Life and who rides His chariot to give back what the devil has stolen. He is mightier than the armies of darkness and stronger than the death's firm grip. In Him is life and He gives abundantly.

When the bier of death met the Lord of Life Jesus did what you cannot do. He took the place of another. Even as our Lord spoke the words of life into lifeless ears, making a dead heart beat and dead flesh revive, He touched the bier of death and took the death that left the boy into Himself. It is the great exchange of salvation. The boy's death for His death. The boy's life for His life. Do not weep for where Jesus is there is life and salvation.

So He does with you and all who meet Him in this wilderness of death. Touching the coffin, the things of death, did not make Jesus unclean, He made them holy. He is not defiled; they are cleansed. Now those who rest in their tombs sleep as those waiting to be awakened.

They lay in death's dominion only for a moment until the word of Jesus penetrates the darkness, entering their dead ears and quickening their hearts so that they sit up and speak. And what do you suppose they will say, those who are awakened from death's tyrannical reign? They will share with you the words of life: Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

Or do you not know, dear Christian, that you are among the dead who have been made alive? You have been baptized into Christ's death in order that, just as Christ is raised from the dead, you too walk in newness of life. The Word of God has penetrated your dead ears, quickening your heart and sanctifying your mind, giving back to you what the devil has stolen. You live the life of the resurrection as the risen Lord Jesus touches you with His body upon your tongue and fills you with His life-giving blood. You do not make Him unclean; He makes you holy. You are alive even though you may die. And if you should die, yet shall you live.

On the cross He has taken your place in death, just as He has taken the places of your loved ones. He died so that death died. He lives so that you will live. Do not weep, for where Jesus is there is life and salvation.

And the life He gives is not empty and fragile. He gives until our cup runneth over and the blessings come to us pressed down and overflowing. He did not just raise the boy from the dead. He gave the boy back to his widowed mother. Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in His holy habitation. He settles the solitary in a home.

He does not just raise you from the death of sin and shame. He places you in His family. He gives you a Mother, His holy Church, from whom you receive your heavenly Father's blessings and love. He gives you brothers and sisters to love and care for you even as you are privileged to love and forgive them as God loves and forgives you through them. He does not raise you so that He may send you back into the world of death. He raises you up and sets you in a home, His home; where you lay your tired head and where you eat the bread of heaven and drink from the river of life; where you hear your Father's words of comfort and peace. In this Great Assembly you bless the Lord with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, all the holy ones of God.

And you will see again those the devil has stolen from you. You will see your father and mother, your sons and daughters and husbands and wives, grandmothers and grandfathers again. They are not lost to Jesus. He is their Keeper as He is your Keeper, and He will not forget them. For they too were baptized into Him and ate the same spiritual food and drank from the same spiritual rock that is Christ. He who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask and think will not let His holy ones see decay or corruption. They will rise again. And they will be given back to you as you will be given to them. In your flesh you shall see them.

You will once again hold them and kiss them. You will once again hear their voice and look into their eyes. Death has not won. What the devil has stolen will be stolen back from him and will be given to the children of God. Do not weep as those who have no hope, for where Jesus is there is life and salvation. Go in peace.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠