

XVI TRINITY 2016
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
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Funerals are by their very nature sad events...but they are not without hope.

My first experience with death was when I was eight years old. My uncle Bernard died. Everyone called him "Barney". It was a sad occasion...I loved my Uncle Barney...but I remember what the priest said...this is not where it ends. We are people of hope!

All of the Gospels give eyewitness accounts of Jesus raising someone from the dead:

- Jesus took the hand of a little girl who had died and told her to get up! He gave her back to her father and told him to get her something to eat.
- Jesus cried when Lazarus died. He told Lazarus' sister Martha not to cry...he is the resurrection and the life...those who believe in him, even though they die, will live. Martha was filled with hope. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and gave him back to Martha.

The Burial Office from the *Book of Common Prayer* begins with the same words Jesus spoke to Martha..."I am the resurrection and the life." They set the tone for the Requiem Mass which follows...it's not about talking about how much we will miss the person or what they meant to us. It's about what Saint Paul says we know...the truth about those who have died...we are people of hope!

In the Gospel, Jesus and his disciples set out from their base of operations in Capernaum and head south through Galilee. They pass through the small village a Nain...about 50 miles north of Jerusalem. Nain still exists today.

As they enter the village, Jesus and his disciples encounter a funeral procession for a widowed mother whose only son has just died. We are not told anything about the widow or her son...but the boy was probably very young.

Widows and orphans were at a disadvantage...social welfare programs did not exist to help them. Saint James tells us to take care of widows and orphans in their suffering. Who would take care of the widowed mother...her only son...her sole means of support...was dead?

Jesus never likes to see people suffer. He saw the widowed mother about to bury her only son and was moved with compassion. He touched the boy's casket and told him to get up...and gave him back to his mother. Jesus turned her grief and despair into joy and hope.

The Gospel accounts of Jesus raising people from the dead are not fairy tales that end with everybody living happily ever after so we can leave Mass today smiling. The people Jesus raised from the dead...died again...and wait for what the writer of Hebrews tells us we all hope for...but have not yet seen...resurrection to life in heaven.

The Gospels teach us Jesus is in the business of putting shattered lives back together no matter how hopeless things look. Jesus takes the overwhelming grief and sorrow we feel when someone we love dies...and transforms us...giving us hope and joy...if we will let him!

Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life." We believe in him...because we are people of hope!

