

10th Sunday in O.T. (Year C) [2016] (Pro-Life)

Homily by Fr. Mark McGuckin

Brothers and sisters, in the sacred liturgy today we encounter our God who is Rescuer. This rescuing aspect of the Blessed Trinity is highlighted today in our readings and, as Christians, this can only bolster our hope. We know that – no matter what, no matter what kind of hardship, persecution, suffering, anxiety, grief – God is there to rescue his beloved children. Now, does he rescue the way we want him to rescue us? Very rarely. His ways are not our ways. Even when a situation seems to be getting worse and worse, when we think God has just taken a vacation (or something), He is there. He is there, always present, always allowing for a greater good to come about. He is there to rescue, to heal on His terms, the effects of which – in the long run – are so much more wonderful than what our own immediate plans offer.

Friends, with this in mind, I'm going to talk about something that is not easy to talk about but something that needs to be addressed in the light of the reality of our rescuer God. What I'm going to speak of is loss of life.

Losing someone close to us, particularly when the circumstances are tragic, losing someone close to us, especially family – it's awful. When we lose a family member, even if we never had one meaningful conversation with them, even if we had never communicated in some way the message of, *"I love you"* or *"I appreciate you and all that you do"*... the loss of a relative, nevertheless, is always raw – to some degree.

We could be intellectually apathetic - indifferent to the loss... but, here's the thing: even when we think a deceased relative didn't really have a positive or significant impact on us... our bodies and souls are still very much affected, they react, they long for restoration. The feeling of loss, of something missing – it's palpable. There is some degree of trauma that is very real, a trauma which affects our whole being. And, it really doesn't matter if we THINK we don't need to grieve... we HAVE to grieve in a healthy way. There's no shame in grieving and to accompany someone along the grieving process – this is so beautiful and powerful. Grieving and all the emotions involved in grieving, it's not a sign of weakness, it's a sign of strength, a process of restoration and it's for everyone – especially when we lose a relative.

Losing a relative, it's different than losing a friend who we're not related to. Don't get me wrong, losing a friend is extremely difficult but family is unique. See, even if a deceased family member was practically a stranger to us, there's a sorrow that infects our hearts when we lose them. Why? Well, we know that between us all there are invisible relational bonds that are very real. As Christians we believe that we are all interconnected organs of the Body of Christ. When one part of the body suffers, the whole corpus feels it. A mother experiences for herself, in a tangible way, the distress of a child in pain, the child's pain is shared, it's mom's pain because the bond is so close. And the distress, pain, sorrow – it's particularly acute when the relational bonds with immediate family members are severed.

Friends, in this regard, we can identify so well with the woman from Zaraphath in our first reading and the woman from Nain whom we heard about in today's Gospel. Both women, through no fault of their own, came 'this close' to losing their sons. You can feel the heartache and anxiety and sense of absolute dread that they were faced with – dread of the possibility of losing the ones closest to them, their only child. But the two women do not lose their sons. We hear of two miraculous healings. The power of God is made manifest through the prayers of

Elijah and, directly paralleling this Old Testament event, the son of the widow at Nain comes back to life after Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ utters the words, “*Young man, I say to you, rise!*” Young man I say to you, rise!

On full display here is the rescuing work of our God. Now hearing these stories, great as they are, splendid as they are... they might stir up in our hearts, negative feelings. We might ask God, “*how is it that the health of the son of the widow in Zaraphath was restored?... how is it that the son of the woman in Nain was brought back to life BUT ... my own relative was not granted this favour?*” Is God capricious or fickle? Does he just heal sometimes and keep his power to himself at other times? What’s the deal God?! Friends, this territory that we just ventured into cannot be easily, quickly unpacked... the mystery of suffering, the mystery of death. In one sense, sure, we know with the light of faith that Christ’s Passion transformed suffering into a redemptive reality and He transformed death into a bridge to everlasting life. But though these realities have been transformed, we know they have not been eliminated and to give a simple solution to the problem of suffering and death to those who are just immersed in grief... to give a simple solution, a simple satisfying answer – it’s impossible. It takes time. It takes a prolonged loving accompaniment.

But here’s the truth: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit – the Most Blessed Trinity... our God is NOT capricious. He is unchangeable, eternally stable. His grace, His life is superabundant and it is for EVERYONE. He is not just sometimes loving, He is always loving, always merciful, always faithful, always the rescuer. Always, no matter how we perceive it, God’s goodness is constant, especially during difficult times.

We have to understand though... (*drawing attention to to the crucifix*) THIS is how he ultimately rescues us – the one sacrifice to end all sacrifices... the one sacrifice that sacramentally continues at this Mass, today, here, now. This is the ultimate posture of love and at times he invites, at times he allows others to participate physically, psychologically, spiritually in a redemptive agony that is not too dissimilar from this posture of love. And at the same time... he remains rescuer! How? Again, when a family member suffers, the whole family is affected and, in terms of the grieving process it is Christ who – if we give Him permission to work – leads us out of the darkness and into the light of full restoration. In Him and with Him, mourning for a loved one becomes a means of deep, lasting nourishment – I’ve felt it myself. He rescues – always! Again, He might not rescue in the way we want Him to but His ways are not our ways. Are His ways worse? No, they’re infinitely better.

Yes, Christ is rescuer. And, brothers and sisters... and since we are interconnected members of His Mystical Body, since we are physical and spiritual extensions of His love and mercy in the world, we are all called to be rescuer Christians – rescuers and agents of healing. Everyone of us – no one excluded. Our prayers of intercession – geared toward rescue. The exercise of our virtues of faith, hope, and love in concrete situations in the world – geared toward rescue. Our sacramental participation at Mass, in the Confessional ... all of it – geared toward rescue, healing, nourishment, restoration.

Friends, as we reflect on these themes... of God as rescuer and WE as rescuers, on this theme of loss of life and particularly the grief of losing family members, it’s hard NOT to see how these themes directly relate to an issue so prevalent in our country today... that is the issue of abortion, which happens 100,000 times a year, here, in our own backyard of Canada.

How many mothers and fathers and grandparents and aunts and uncles and siblings are living with the loss of pre-born children who were never given the chance to grow up? How many of us are grieving with silent secrets? How many of us are like the widow who says to Elijah, *“Have you come to me to call attention to my guilt?”* It is precisely in these moments, pertaining to this painful topic, that we must look to God as rescuer. Christ died and rose to forgive us and to offer us the fullness of life. Even when we can’t understand why things unfolded as they did, it is God who wants to rescue us from our sin and our heart wrenching pain and to ‘make all things new’ ... not to rewrite the past but to make ALL THINGS NEW, NOW. We can at any time say in our own words: *“God, let the life breath return to me. Restore me, restore my loved ones who are agonizing. Wash away my iniquity and cleanse me of my sin.”*

Our past, our memories shouldn’t frighten us. Our memories present to us what we need to be rescued from. So, therefore, self-reflective questions shouldn’t frighten us... we can ask ourselves, for example, *“What abortion involvement – through commission or omission – do I need to be rescued from?”* And then, *“How can **I** become a rescuer for the youngest among us and their parents in crisis?”*

As we reflect on these questions, know this friends... Once we allow God to rescue us – and He WILL rescue us if we open the door for him... we will be lovingly driven to embrace our duty to be God’s instruments of rescue for others. Today is a new day, tomorrow is a new day. We have to take advantage of these new chapters in our lives! In his latest encyclical, Pope Francis says, *“We cannot fail to offer the light of faith as a support to families [who are grieving]. To turn our backs on a grieving family would show a lack of mercy, mean the loss of a pastoral opportunity, and close the door to other efforts at evangelization.”* Friends, I think this is especially applicable to our rescuing duty directed toward all those mothers and fathers in the world, in our own civic community, who are entrenched in post-abortive trauma. Let me tell you, there is plenty of opportunity out there – from supporting the rock solid Rachel’s vineyard ministry to getting involved in local pro-life initiatives and groups and to even this week, this upcoming Friday... inviting people you know and accompanying them to a special memorial service for aborted children that’ll be happening right here, at St. Pat’s, 7:30pm, Friday, June 10th... it’s going to be a blessed evening. Yes, the opportunities are right in front of us.

As Christians we cannot stand by idle – we have to be intentional, we have to be involved, following in the blessed footsteps of Our Lord who is Rescuer, who is Healer. Let us RISE to the occasion. God bless us all. Amen.