

## God has visited his people

The Ordinary Sundays of the Year are now back with us. Because of the way Easter shifts around between late March and mid April, we seldom get to listen to the gospels of certain Sundays. So the fact that we've alighted on the 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday (which hasn't had an airing in over 15 years) brings with it a rare opportunity to read the story of the widow of Nain and the revival of her dead son. To help us understand its message some context may be useful.

In Luke's gospel thus far, Jesus has been teaching and proclaiming the Good News. We remember how we listened to the Sermon at Nazareth when he proclaimed those prophetic words of Isaiah: *The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me and he has sent me to proclaim the good news to the poor*. He has called his disciples and has begun to teach and to heal. He has generated both great admiration as well as opposition, and the question is constantly being asked: who is this man? Following the cure of the centurion's servant he now encounters this funeral cortege lead by a grieving mother who was also a widow. Jesus is surrounded not just by the crowd of mourners, but also by those who have accompanied him, and the scene is thus set. Feeling sorry for the mother who has lost her only son, he brings him back from death and restores him to his mother. The point of the story seems rather opaque and obscure until we read of what happens next. You remember that at the time of Jesus' baptism, Luke has told us that John the Baptist was in prison. It is following this miracle of the raising of this widow's son, that disciples of John take this news to him in prison. John, having received this news wants to know if Jesus is the one who is to come, and he refers his disciples back to Jesus to ask him. Jesus tells them to go back to John and report what they have seen and Jesus once more quotes passages from Isaiah, in particular: *Your dead will come back to life, your corpses will rise again* (Is Ch 26 v19). The deeds of Jesus thus speak of his authority as a great prophet through whom God does great things. This miracle then has a specific role and meaning as a pointer, telling us who Jesus is, confirming his status. The section ends with Jesus bemoaning the fact that his contemporaries having witnessed both John's and his own testimony, simply prevaricate, calling John possessed and denouncing Jesus as a glutton.

As always we are left with the difficult question of where do I stand in this debate? We are intelligent people, clever enough to be able to persuade ourselves that with a little sideways thinking we can avoid the big issues of the day and live out our without too much difficulty. But surely the point of our Christianity is to approach these big issues with the insight of faith as our guide. What is it that we see when we observe the world around us? A world hopelessly adrift and lost, or one in which *a great prophet has appeared among us* where *God has visited his people*.

The challenge is great because it involves commitment. We have to be concerned enough to engage in the exchange of views that goes on, and to put forward and argue for the Christian view even though we know that this will cost us. But it will reward us too because people will listen to arguments and views offered from a perspective of love and not confrontation. People will hear words of compassion and comfort, rather than words of bitterness and hatred, and they will see in the person of Jesus, the God who has visited his people as a human person.