

10th Sun. Ord. Time (C)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
(also Holy Ghost Parish, Dubuque)
June 4, 5, 2016

“If it looks like a duck, and quacks like a duck ... it is a duck!” This is a familiar adage to most all of us, and probably most frequently it proves to be true. It is not true, however, when referring to today's Scriptures. While both the First Scripture and the Gospel text are about dead people being raised to life, the lesson is not at all about either death or resurrection. At least not directly. What can be said about today's Scriptures however is twofold: one is God visits his people, and the other is God comes to the aid of the poor.

First, God 'visiting his people'. Only God has power over death and whenever someone escapes an occasion of death, people of faith quickly credit it to God, and in some way give glory to God. You may have done this yourself. Not surprisingly there are many examples of such in Scriptures. People are cured or aided in some way, and then give glory to God. Even just in Luke's gospel account:

- healing of the paralytic (Luke 5)
- healing of the crippled woman (Luke 13)
- healing of the ten lepers (Luke 17)
- healing of the blind man of Jericho (Luke 18)
- healing of the centurion at foot of the cross (Luke 23)

The people of Nain who witness today's miracle also give glory to God. They all realize that God has 'visited his people'. God visits His people, and brings some kind of life and healing out of situations that are clearly dire, even full of death.

But 'why' does God visit his people? God does this to raise up the lowly, and in the days of the Scriptures women, and particularly widowed women, were among the lowliest of the lowly. In those days women depended on men. Their spouse and possibly a son were the only entree they had to anything of social inclusion, social benefits, of which there were very few in those days, even for those not among the lowly. Men and children got counted; women did not. Recall even last weekend's gospel story of the loaves and fishes it stated that there were 5000 men in the group to be fed. We also know the women in both today's gospel and First Reading were among the lowly because neither of them are mentioned by name. They are known only for their lack of status: widows.

Mary the mother of Jesus was in this 'lowly' category: young, no husband when we first meet her, and pregnant. Mary was doomed to lowliness until, that is, she was visited by God. Just listen to her prayer when her cousin Elizabeth greets her at the Visitation scene.

My soul magnifies (glorifies) the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.

For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things

for me.

(she continues) he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree
he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.

The entire mission of Jesus was to 'lift up the lowly' ... hear his words as he stood before
the people in his hometown synagogue:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. “

As so often happens to us, it happened to the people in today's Scriptures. They were so
mesmerized by the wonder of the miracles that they miss the entire point ... the raising
up of the lowly. God visits people, God does wonders, not to stun us but to move us.
God does miracles, God raises up those in death-like situations in order jump-start us to
remedy their situations, to recognize their lowliness and their need, and then assist them.

Many of the systems embedded in our culture foster and protect a contrary agenda: how
do I, as opposed to you, protect and promote myself at all costs? The American biblical
scholar and theologian, Walter Wink (died in 2012) spent much of his theological
reflection on just this theme. Listen to the names of some of his books: Naming the
Powers, Unmasking the Powers, Engaging the Powers, When the Powers Fall, and The
Powers that Be.

If you really want to know what today's miracle stories are pointing at, listen to some of
the assumptions that flow from the 'promoting of oneself agenda':

people on top work harder and so should be paid more
never share information that gives you an edge
whatever you do to someone is justified because you can be sure they would do it to you
wishing people well is enough
charity begins at home

Yes, at least in the case of today's Scriptures, what looks like a duck and quacks like a
duck is not a duck at all. What looks like two warm and harmless miracle stories are
really not that at all. They are events that aim to restructure the class system that kept
women, and particularly widows, living a dependent existence. In a less visual way,
these stories do for women and especially widows what Jesus did physically to the
religious elite when he entered the temple and turned over all the tables of business and
kicked out the money changers. It was a system that needed to be overcome, and Jesus
the Messiah was sent from God to begin this. Obviously the work is not over. After
hearing today's miracle stories, what can you do to throw light on systems in our culture
today that keep the lowly low. I heard a wonderful quote recently from a black artist in
Chicago, who opened an art studio and gallery in a reclaimed neighborhood: “The poor
have a right to enjoy beautiful things, but the poor also have a right not to be poor.”
All this from two stories we thought were about death and resurrection. We have much
to do before our deaths, and we will probably only rise if we join Jesus in raising up the
lowly.