

TRINITY 16

TEXT: Luke 7:2, Ephesians 3:13.

Today is the 4th anniversary of the events of 9-11. These events shook all of us and certainly came close to home with two of the hijackers beginning their journey through our airport. In recent weeks, we have also seen the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and watched the human drama unfold. We have seen the suffering of man as the flood waters rose and the storm took everything from many of the residents of the Gulf communities where the storm came ashore. In many cases, like 9-11, it took quite a while to find all the bodies.

Whether it is a natural disaster or man's inhumanity to man, we often turn to God in our hopes and desires for those suffering and ask for His grace and His compassion on those affected. Our Gospel this morning highlights the compassion that our Lord had on a poor widow. She had lost her only son who no doubt cared for his mother as sons were expected to do. Now she was suffering in her loss, not only for the death of her son but also for herself as she wondered what was to become of her. Jesus saw her pain and understood the scope of her loss and He showed her His compassion and in an act which astonished everyone who witnessed it, brought the young man back to life. He restored the widow's son to her and people throughout the region began to speak of this wonderful and great prophet who had the power to bring life back to those who were dead.

Imagine the power of that moment. Imagine the relief in that mother's heart when she realized this prophet had brought her son back to her. In a moment, her grief was gone and it was replaced by a joy that we can only try to understand. Her world was back in tack and the child she loved could once again care for her and fill her empty days. Her family had been restored.

In all the recent news reports about the hurricane, I was most impressed by the witness of a man who had been evacuated from New Orleans after the storm hit. He had made it to Houston with most of his family. He had no idea what had happened to his step sister but the rest of his family was intact. They had lost everything-their home, their jobs, their possessions and had nothing but a few items they carried and what had been given them by the response agencies. This man looked at the camera and he said, "God has been good to us."

I am sure many folks who heard that statement wondered what he was talking about. Had he not lost everything, was some of his family still missing? How could he be grateful to God who had let this tragedy befall him and thousands more? This fellow understood the magnitude of God's compassion through his faith.

Paul talks about that this morning in his letter to the Ephesians. Paul knew that this was a young church and the community was facing many trials. They were being persecuted and things were no doubt going to get worse. His prayer for them was that no matter what was going to happen, that their faith would be strong. "I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long, and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

Above everything else, should be our understanding that no matter what trial befalls us, what disaster strikes us, what tragedy hits us, that God loves us and cares for us through his love and compassion for us. That no matter what the outcome, we will be held up in his precious hands. That may be tough to remember sometimes when we are in the midst of suffering but God has blessed us and we must allow our faith to give us the hope He promises for us.

I often tell the story of one of my early trips to sea. How being caught in a terrific storm, I feared that my life was about to end. I thought of my young family, all of my obligations and all of my hopes and dreams and saw them coming to an end. But in the middle of all of this, somehow I was able to set aside all my

fears and worries and draw on that faith to find solace. The Holy Spirit opened my heart and helped me to understand one simple thing, which no matter what might happen, God was there with me and live or die, he would care for me. What a powerful relief that was for me. It took all fear from my heart and although the outcome was in my favor, it helped me realize that God's love was so deep for me, that I could count on Him without question.

As the next few weeks unfold for the people of New Orleans and Mississippi, as we reflect on the horrors of what happened four years ago or during the other disasters that have hit mankind, as we face our own trials and tribulations in everyday life-KNOW God is there. He upholds us and even if the outcome is the worse we can imagine, we are in his care.

Where is God's compassion for us? It is in the cross of Christ, in the hope that transcends all of our earthly fears and worries, trials and tribulations. It is in the depth of love He has for us that we cannot begin to understand. That no matter what happens in our lives, that He will be there for us and we will be in His care always.

So, I leave you with Paul's prayer-"I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long, and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." AMEN