

New Brighton, Sunday 10th September 2023

15th Sunday after Pentecost

“A dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.”¹

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

For the second time in the liturgical year, we're hearing the Gospel of Naim's widow, whose son was risen up by Jesus. The Church is presenting us with this moving excerpt of the Gospel, when Jesus, having compassion towards one of us mourning, performed a miracle to stop the tears of the mother.

This poor young man who was carried out of the city was always understood by the tradition of the Church, as the sinner, who fell into mortal sin, and is dead to divine life. St Francis de Sales reminds us in a very simple sentence what mortal sin does to our soul:

“Sickness or injury [venial sin] can deprive the body of vitality, deprive it of movement or feeling; only death [mortal sin] can still the heart.”²

A soul within this awful condition is unable to perform anything good for its salvation. The only one thing to do is repentance, and the reception of the Sacrament of Penance through the ministry of confession. This young man was dead to this life as our soul is when we leave the Lord apart in our life. Thanks to our Mother, the widow of the Gospel, the Church, we can still claim a merciful grace of conversion from the Lord's Passion. As we are marked forever with the seal of Baptism, She's mourning for our infidelity and death. Her prayer and penance is making us worth of God's forgiveness and resurrection.

“Sin is shameful only at the time we commit it. Changed into confession and repentance, it is honourable and brings salvation.”³

says St Francis de Sales in his Introduction to the Devout Life. For the time we are living on Earth, we are given opportunities to come to Our Lord and leave a real life of penance and thanksgiving for so many renewed graces.

Just before reading this Gospel, we heard the Apostle of the Gentiles giving us some advice about penance and mortification. If by great misfortune we failed like the young man of the Gospel, let's make a good resolution to practice penance and amend our life. If we fortunately never failed, let's keep our soul safe and secure behind the walls of that same life of penance and mortification.

Dom Guéranger gives us this piece of advice:

¹ Lk., VII, 12.

² St. Francis de Sales, Treatise on the Love of God, Book 4, Chapter 2.

³ St. Francis de Sales, Introduction to the Devout Life, Part I, Chapter 19.

“When the flesh has been subdued, we must take care and not suppose that the structure of our perfection is completed. Not only must the combat be kept up after the victory, under penalty of losing all we have won, but, we must also be on the watch, lest one or other of the heads of the triple concupiscence take advantage of the soul's efforts being elsewhere directed, to raise itself against us, and sting us all the more terribly, because it is left to do just as it pleases. The Apostle warns us, here, of vain-glory, and well he may; for vain-glory is, more than other enemies, always in a menacing attitude, ready to infuse its subtle poison even into acts of humility and penance ; hence, the Christian, who is desirous to serve God, and not his own gratification, by the virtues he practises, must keep up a specially active vigilance over this passion.”⁴

As usual, this spirit of penance cannot be maintained without lots of patience towards us. Therefore, if we do not completely succeed on our first try, let's not fall into despair, but starting over, let's rise again and walk towards our salvation, following this little advice of St Francis de Sales:

“We must be very sorry for faults with a repentance which is strong, constant, tranquil, but not troubled, unquiet or fainthearted.”⁵

because

“Christ was more concerned with St. Peter's repentance and remorse than with his sin.”⁶

The merciful bounty Our Lord showed towards the poor young man will also be given to us when we will be in need. Do not delay a confession with false excuses such as lack of time, delay of waiting in the queue and other things. Come regularly to receive God's forgiveness and maintain this spirit of humility the great Benedictine Abbot urged us to. There will always be something to be mentioned, as a pious saying tells that Saints used to commit a sin seven times a day. A good resolution to start with would be to come at least once a month or every two weeks.

“Our Saviour has entrusted to his Church the Sacrament of Penance and Confession. It was his intention that by this Sacrament we cleanse ourselves from all our sins, every time and as many times as we may be defiled by them. Therefore, Philothea, never let your heart remain poisoned by sin for a long time, since such an easy remedy is available to you.”⁷

Jesus is expecting you at the door of this box, to cast out the devil from your soul, and give you his grace to remain with Him forever.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

⁴ Dom Guéranger, Liturgical Year, 15th Sunday after Pentecost.

⁵ St Francis de Sales, Treatise on the Love of God, Book 9, Chapter 7.

⁶ The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales, VII, 8.

⁷ St. Francis de Sales, Introduction to the Devout Life, Part I, Chapter 19.