

October 9, 2011

# Sunday Sermon

Fr Ambrose Young  
Entrance of the Theotokos Skete



## THE GOSPEL ON THE LORD WHO RAISES THE DEAD

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost Luke 7:11-16

*And He said: 'Young man, I say unto thee: Arise!' And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak.*

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

When, in all the history of mankind, has anyone EVER raised anyone from the dead, I ask you?! You can search all the annals of the ancient world, the philosophers, the ancient pre-Christian religions and it isn't until you come to the Old Testament that you find three cases of such a miracle, through the intercessions of the prophets Elijah and Elisha—and these are the only ones recorded in that sacred chronicle.

And then came the Son of God, Jesus, the Christ, who repeatedly saved men from death. As St. Nicolai Velimirovitch reminds us rather pointedly: "There have been many conquerors in history, *but who of them has conquered death?*"

The Greek word for resurrection is *anastasis*, meaning arising, a raising, or the old fashioned English word, "quicken". So resurrection means a returning to life subsequent to death. It is interesting to note that the word, quicken, means to be made alive or "put to life" just as to kill means to "put to death." When the Lord raised anyone from the dead it was as though a bolt of lightning had cleaved the very heavens and the earth. And this is why this Gospel account tells us that when the Savior raised the dead youth, "there came a fear on all, and they glorified God, saying that 'a great prophet is risen up among us', and that 'God has delivered His people'."

By raising the dead, and, as God, later raising *Himself* from the dead, Christ showed that both the living and the dead are the same to Him: *alive*; thus has He opened the gates to His Kingdom. But He also saw that many of those who *think* they are alive are actually *already* living in a grave, whereas those who die in Him, Jesus, are the one's who are really alive. And this why He told us: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul" (Matt. 10:28). You see, it is only sin that can bring about the death of the soul. In this way,

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the Redeemer sought to still our fear of physical death, but increase our fear of spiritual death.

This makes complete sense: if someone is able to raise to life a corpse—and in the case of Lazarus it was a corpse already several days dead and stinking--then that same Person could raise someone who is dead in sin to spiritual life once again, couldn't He? And of how many of *us* is this true—that we are dead in sin?

Any of us who have been with or near a dead body know that this is a very mysterious experience. Literally from one moment to the next, life leaves the flesh, and the sentence of mortality on all mankind is passed once again. It is interesting to me that when animals are dying they hide themselves away, as if ashamed of their own mortality. And in our culture today death has become something shameful, something to be hidden away and covered up as much as possible, so that people don't have to confront the actual reality. It's easier to look upon a dead body in its coffin and whisper, "It looks like he's just asleep." And even easier if the coffin is close, or there's immediate cremation (which, by the way, is forbidden by the Church). The denial of death and its meaning is rampant in our culture and society today.

The Holy Fathers teach us that the stench which comes from our bodies after death, when they begin to decay, actually reflects the stench of our own sins while alive. And this is why, in the case of many saints, their bodies did not decay! And in the case of some, an ineffable and heavenly fragrance also came from their bodies. Archbishop Kyril of San Francisco was present in Jerusalem when the coffin of the Grand Duchess Martyr Elizabeth was opened some years ago. He told me that not only was she partially incorrupt, but an otherworldly aroma—similar to violets, but better, greater—arose from her body. This was not because she was utterly sinless, but because she repented and was raised from spiritual death by the Lord. This is all we need to do, too, brothers and sisters. Repent. And be raised.

All of this reminds me of the random but providentially chosen verses from scripture that I was called upon to read aloud by the bishop when I was tonsured a Reader, many decades ago. These verses come from St. Paul:

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"As is the earthly, such are they also that are earthy; and as it the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brother, flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God; *neither doth corruption inherit incorruption*. Behold, I show you a mystery."

(I Cor. 15:47-51)

In other words, Christ, the Lover of Mankind (as we refer to Him in the divine services), calls us out of the corruption of sin and this life, to the incorruption of repentance and spiritual resurrection or rebirth—that is, eternal life *in and through Him*. The manner in which we achieve this is something each of us has to work out within himself and the Lord. It is a life long task, and it is hard work.

But we should all take to heart, and clutch to our breasts like life itself, this promise made by Christ: "Verily, verily I say unto you: the hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live."

Therefore let each of us say: "Lord, let me hear Thy voice and live!"

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