

**Reflection on the Gospel-Ordinary Time 10C**  
**(Luke 7:11-17)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Liberation or release for the most marginalised is at the heart of the mission of the Lukan Jesus. At the beginning of his ministry, we find him in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, reading from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and appropriating to himself and to his mission the words of the prophet. He knows that the Spirit of God is upon him and that God has anointed him to bring good news to the destitute and release to the shattered (Luke 4:16-20). As the gospel narrative unfolds, we hear story after story of Jesus bringing good news for the destitute and release for the shattered.

In today's gospel passage, he encounters a funeral cortege at the gates of Nain. He is said to be moved with compassion (*esplanchnisthē*) for the plight of a widow who is shattered and under threat of a life of destitution. Women who lacked the protection of a husband or adult son were among the most destitute in first century Palestine. The unnamed woman of our story has already suffered the loss of her husband. She now grieves for the loss of her adult son. For a widow to lose her only son was nothing short of shattering. She would be entirely dependent on the goodwill of neighbours and friends and whatever extended family she may have had. Jesus knows that the death of her son has made this woman even more dependent and vulnerable than she had been made by her husband's death.

Nain was a tiny village in the Valley of Jezreel in the southern part of Galilee. As in every town, the gate would have been the place where legal cases were determined and justice was delivered. Now, at the gate of this town, Jesus of Nazareth brings both mercy and justice. He feels the pain of the widow in his own being and responds by restoring life, not only to the young man, but to his mother, to the extended family and to the grieving village community. Like this young man, Jesus is the only son of a woman who had possibly been widowed by the time he began his public ministry. His mother is to know the same pain of loss as her unnamed "sister" in Nain.

The sight of the funeral procession and the tears of the woman elicit the compassion of Jesus. The verb "to have compassion" (*splanchnizein*) denotes a deeply felt response in the depths of a person's being. It implies not just an emotional response, but action for mercy and justice. Tears will function in next week's gospel reading as an instrument of hospitality. In this story, tears and touch bring life to a son who was lost and restore life to a community and to a family within that community.