

### ***Homily for September 19<sup>th</sup> 2017***

Back in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, St. Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan interpreted this evening's Gospel in the following way. He said:

***The widow signifies Mother Church, weeping for those who are dead in sin and carried beyond the safety of her gates. The multitudes looking on will praise the Lord when sinners rise again from death and are restored to their mother.***

To see the passage this way brings it to life for those living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is because it speaks of the Church's sorrow over those who have died to faith and have distanced themselves from the Church. This explains one of the primary reasons for the New Evangelization that was proclaimed by St. John Paul II back in 1990. It was to inspire the Church to reach out to all of those, who although baptized and confirmed as Catholics, have fallen away from the Church and are spiritually dead. It is also an invitation to stir up those who are in the Church to the fullness of what it means to live our life in Christ, with deepening obedience and discipleship to Jesus.

In today's first reading we hear words that speak to the heart of discipleship as it is to be embodied in the Church's ordained leaders, Bishops, Priests and Deacons. Because the Church is a hierarchy, those entrusted with her leadership are to be examples for the faithful and so their lives are to be worthy of imitation.

It is noteworthy that in talking about the virtues of ordained leadership in the Church Paul's focus is on the moral character. Listen again to the list:

***Now a bishop (in the apostolic Church this included both bishops and priests because the three offices that we have today of bishop, priest and deacon, were still developing), must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money.***

People say that the faith is caught before it is taught. And in a certain way this is true. Bishops and priests whose personal piety is expressed by how they relate to God and to others will then have a voice that can be heard from the pulpit. This is because there is an integrity between the witness of their lives with the proclamation of the Gospel. The professional quality mentioned here is "an apt teacher" but all of the other virtues have to do with character and conduct.

The importance of this is explained later in the passage where Paul writes:

***He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.***

Although there are times when people will be offended by the Gospel of Jesus Christ because of its call to deeper conversion, people should not be offended by the character of those entrusted with the stewardship of the Gospel. For when a messenger lacks integrity of

character, the very Gospel of God and Mother Church suffer disgrace. Indeed, says Paul, such leaders come entrapped in the devil's snare whose desire for increasing numbers of people to be on their spiritual death piers.

Back in 2009 Emeritus Pope Benedict highlighted the "necessary, indeed indispensable, aspiration to moral perfection that must dwell in every authentically priestly heart."

This is Saint Paul's message in today's Epistle. For such a priestly heart expresses the heart of the Church as represented by the Widow Nain. Godly priests, inspire in turn godly disciples among the faithful which in turn ignites the fire for the salvation of those dead to Christ because of sin.