

Hope and Comfort. (1 King 17:17-24; Galatians 1:11-24; Luke 7:11-17)

* Friends, we know all kind of tragedies and incidences take place regularly around the globe. Some of them may even surprise us with their intensity or enormity, like the recently erupted volcano in Iceland, or the explosion of the drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico. However, as intelligent people we are never challenged with a question, *Why did such things happen?* On the other hand, if there is occurring of something bad at the individual level, even scientists cannot answer, *Why did it happen to me?* Once a pastor of my former church said, *we don't know why the hurricane Katrina hit the New Orleans instead of Houston, but we have to thank God that He has not yet hit us because we deserve it.* A few days ago I walked with my wife within our subdivision; accidentally a heavy piece of wood dropped across the sidewalk, just 60 feet from us. My first word was 'Wow'. Then we gave thanks to the Lord for not being challenged with such a question, *Why did God let this happen to us?*

* Now, do you think I am brave enough to give my answer to anyone who is challenged with a similar question? Friends, Sorry, I wouldn't know, but with the help of God we could where is our lectionary speaks on behalf of the challenged. For this reason let's pray to the Lord. Dear Lord Jesus, today we've heard the wonderful stories from the Bible, they teach where people believe and trust your words soon after their share of sorrow will be turned to joy. Here we ask your Spirit to be our Teacher and Helper so that we never fall out of your grace despite the harsh times we sometimes go through. O Lord, we understood that you have the words of eternal life, and we have no one to whom else we shall go. Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord. Amen

* Friends, when I prayerfully considered a topic for preaching, I noted that all three readings for this Sunday are pretty much the same in some respects. To this point the reading from (1King 17:17-24) narrates the story of a widow's son death. In brief, here is the story. The poor widow and her son were blessed with the coming to them the prophet Elijah when the severe famine spread in Palestine and surrounding countries. These people to whom Elijah came lived in the village Zarephath, located between two cities, Sidon and Tyre. After the coming of Elijah, the woman immediately acknowledged the prophet as a servant of the God of Israel; she believed and did everything that Elijah told her to do. Elijah had stayed at her house for a long time and each day was blessed with food and drink. Accidentally the widow's boy got very sick, and one day Elijah saw him dead on his mother's lap. When he approached her, she looked at him with an unspoken question, Elijah, *Why did God let this happen to me?* Then she concluded, *What have I to do with you, O man of God? have you come to put God in mind of my sin, and to put my son to death?* (1Ki 17:18). That what was happened, but it is not the end of the story.

* Friends, the epistolary reading (Gal 1:11-24) for today also narrates a story with the interesting question. Here Paul recalled a part of his life. In fact Paul is the apostle of Jesus Christ due to a direct call from the Lord, (Gal 1:16; Act 9:3-15). At first, Paul, also Saul, was known as a zealous Pharisee who persecuted the Church of Christ and may even have been a member of the Sanhedrin. Surprisingly, in one moment, the zealous persecutor became the advocate of Christ. It was amazing news to hear for his Brothers and especially for the Sanhedrin. Many Pharisees who had known Saul as a great supporter of their beliefs, now see him as a betrayer. What is shame they might exclaim? Even they might ask each other, *Why did God let this happen to us? Then, after some days, the Jews made an agreement together to put him to death, (Act 9:23).* That was what happened, but it is not the end of this story.

* Now we'll focus on (Luk 7: 11-17) where it relates the first reading from (1King 17) in which another widow lost her son. However, (Luk 7) doesn't tell anything about widow's reaction on the death of her son. It merely says that the dead boy was the only son of his mother, and that a large crowd was with that mother during the procession, (Luk 7:12). The given details associate with one's feeling of sorrow followed by a natural question, *Why did God let this happen to her?* In addition, the question becomes even more questionable if we take into consideration the fact that the dead person was a young man, his mother was devoted and kind person who had lost a husband! That was what happened, but it is still not the end of the story.

* With God's help, the correct answers to the thrice posed questions are possible because we are given to know the cause and effect of each story. First, let's answer the widows from Zarephath and Nain as far as their stories are identical. *To be known as the God of truth, righteousness and mercy; to be known as God whom you can believe and trust unconditionally; to be known as God who alone has power to rise from the dead and give everlasting life are reasons enough why your sons died.* And the widows responded accordingly, *"Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth," (1Ki 17:24).* Other widow also said the word, *I know, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" (Luk 7:16).*

* After the widows, the Pharisees asked the question. As we remember, the incident with Saul's conversion brought the entire party of orthodox Jews into disrepute. They asked, *Why did God let this happen to us?* Well, let's give them an account. *Folks, believe, it happened for your benefit, not your disgrace. You should obey the God of your fathers as Saul did, who is also Paul. Doing this you would be saved by grace through faith alone. Let it become known to all Israel that it is impossible to be justified by imperfect obedience to the Law. In addition, history proves, no Saul, nor anyone else were able to stand firm against Jesus, (Act 9:4);*

otherwise all his persecutors would face judgment, (Act 12:23). For the Scripture says, It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, (Heb 10:31). On hearing this some Pharisees like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (disciple), responded positively. That question didn't challenge them anymore. However, many Jews including the Pharisees were convicted by what Paul said, (Act 28:24), and they departed from him and never returned! Finally we arrive at the end but it is still not the real end.

* Friends, it would not be right to conclude that the Bible stories have enough capacity to embrace all the imaginable cases on the matter, *Why did this happen to me?* Unlike our stories, the individuals might not have the knowledge of cause and effect. For example, it became known to us that the death of the sons of the widows were a cause, and the resurrections of their sons were the effects. After that, people have seen the glory of God and worship him alone.

Next, Paul's conversion was a cause and his victorious ministry was an effect, so that God in Christ Jesus may be believed and worshiped. On the other hand, Christians who encounter trials or times of sorrow might not be enlightened as to the knowledge of cause and effect. Therefore, the inevitable question, *Why did God let this happen to me?*, cannot be escaped if there is no knowledge of cause and effect.

* Dear Christians, the solution of the problem is for us to trust Jesus Christ who said, *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, (Joh 11:25).* Now we are given to know only one cause of all imaginable accidents and that is sin, ours or somebody else. But we are given to believe that Jesus will be glorified through our death when *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet ... the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed, (1Co 15:52).* The resurrection will be the effect of our life in Christ Jesus we are living today; then the inevitable question, *Why did God let this happen to me?*, will be understood in full, and God in Christ Jesus will be glorified forever.

Beloved , the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your and my spirit.

Amen