

## Fifteenth Talk

## THE ALL-INCLUSIVENESS OF GOD

Luke VII: 11-16. *"Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out - the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, 'Don't cry'. Then he went up and touched the coffin and those carrying it stood still, He said, 'Young man, I say to you, get up.' The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. They were all filled with awe and praised God. 'A great prophet has appeared among us,' they said. 'God has come to help his people.' "*

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Brothers, When I was last in Canada, I asked for six of our Brothers under the age of fifty to volunteer for South America. Yesterday I had an e-mail from a volunteer who stated that he did not know any Spanish but that he was willing to learn. He stated: "I believe that my experience of God is calling me to step out." Those words stayed with me. Everything I believe echoes with those words. This man's experience of God draws him out. When I was starting as a young Brother and going into my first school, how I wish that I was told at that stage to find out each day what my ministry was saying to me about God. I believe it would have given me a different slant about how to look at my life, to look on how my ministry was revealing God to me. I was so concerned about the young fellow in the seat in front of me that I think I forgot God.

Brothers, we are all shaped by our history, by our tradition. It gives us our identity. This shaped Edmund Rice too. He was born in Ireland of Catholic parents and this brought with it a whole cultural background. He belonged to a certain tradition that shaped how he thought and acted. The same is true of Jesus of Nazareth. You and I at certain times in our lives, if we are at all living the way we should, do certain things and later ask ourselves why we did them.

When I was principal of our school in Delhi, I remember that one morning a lady was walking up and down outside my office, as if she were working up courage to come in. After some time she did. It was the last day for the payment of school fees before the final exams. After that day a fine would be imposed for late payment. At that time the fees would have been no more than 75 Rupees, or E.1.35 cents per month and the fine would have been 5c. The lady sat down and handed me a

cheque, stating that it was in payment of her son's fees. When I directed her to the general office, she drew my attention to the cheque, which was post-dated by ten days. In explanation she stated that she was in financial difficulties and would not have any money until ten days later. That made me look more intensely at her and then something happened inside me that I cannot explain. I excused myself for a moment, left the office to go to my room, from where I collected Rs.75 and put it in an envelope. On my return I handed it to the lady and directed her to the main office, where she could pay her fees. As she stood up she opened the envelope and on seeing the money said half to me and half to herself, "You are God!" I never saw her again. When I was alone that evening I asked myself why I had acted as I did. Responding to a sudden impulse I checked the parents' register, only to find out that the lady was a Hindu from Bengal and a widow.

Somehow unknown to myself that morning I had tapped into a whole tradition - the deepest part of our tradition - that God is the protector of the widow and the orphan. I thought then of the passage in Luke VII: 11-16, which is given above. Funerals, such as this one, are very common in poor countries. The heart of Jesus went out to this widow. When he restored her son to life and returned him to his mother, all the people were filled with awe and praised God. The instinctive reaction of those people, as well as of the lady in my office, was to praise God. Perhaps the widow who came to me was saying in her heart, "Yes, there is a God!"

I have given you that story so that you also would tap into your own lives and see the different times you have responded, at times almost out of character, because you belong to a tradition and you are trying to live that tradition faithfully. I believe that ministry should be for us a means of discovering God anew. Jesus discovered aspects that surprised him of this God.

Edwina tells of Dolores, a prostitute she had befriended. She took this girl off the streets, cleaned her and dressed her up. But every now and then Dolores would slip back into drink, drugs and prostitution. On each such occasion, Edwina would bring her back. She kept up this practice for years until one day she decided that she had done enough. Dolores would have to learn to be independent. Some weeks later Dolores phoned Edwina, asking her to come and bring her back. Edwina told her to get on to a taxi and come on her own. She knew where to come and Edwina would pay the fare. Two nights later a police officer phoned Edwina and stated that Dolores had died of an overdose. Clutched in the hand of the corpse, he said, was a slip of paper on which were written Edwina's name, address and phone number.

When Edwina went to collect the body, she was furious. She said to God, "All along I was faithful. You have let me down." She arranged a service in a funeral parlour, wondering if anyone would come. Imagine her surprise when quite a large number of people turned up, among whom were pickpockets, pimps, prostitutes, a priest, a nun and a Christian Brother. All of a sudden it was clear to Edwina that while she was trying to save the life of Dolores, God was forming a community. She was of the opinion that there could be no other explanation for having pickpockets, pimps, prostitutes, a priest, a nun and a Christian Brother, all sitting side by side together, thanking God for the sister who had just died. That taught her then that God's mission and hers were not the same. So one of the first things I must check to see is if my mission and God's are the same. Am I really looking at the Kingdom of God? Am I really looking at the deeper values that are there?

On another occasion a beautiful woman came to Edwina's, saying that she wanted to get away from the streets. Edwina took her in but after a short time she noticed that the other girls did not like her. When she spoke to them about it, they insisted that there was something strange about the new lady. That led Edwina to observe her closely for a while and then Edwina called her and told her that she had not been honest. At that stage the lady admitted that she was a man and knowing that Edwina would not take her in, had put on the disguise. Then Edwina realised that while God was saying, "*My kingdom is for everyone*", she had been putting up walls. Now she realised the inclusiveness of God's reign. That is something that we Brothers grappled with when we came to India - Catholics and those who are not Catholics. We had to ask ourselves such questions as; "Does religion become the dividing line? What am I doing in my ministry? Who is excluded?"

When we as the Congregation Leadership Team sat down at the beginning of our term, we asked ourselves, "What do we want to witness to?" We put down four words for ourselves: compassionate; collaborative; empowering and non-violent. So ask yourself the question, "What face of Jesus is seen through what I am doing? Ask God to let you see his gentleness, his patience, his non-violence and his inclusiveness, so that they may be reflected in you when you leave this place.