

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Yesterday, at a funeral, I spoke of the seasons of a person's life. My emphasis there was on the autumn of our years. How formative those years of our lives are in preparing us for the life to come when we continue our journey into eternity.

Today, I would ask all of you to join me in considering with these young graduates the Spring time of our lives. Spring is a time of new life bursting forth from the earth. It is a time of beauty and hope and vibrancy. In the Spring time of our lives everything is possible. We feel invincible. It is a time of limitless possibilities, new worlds to be explored, dreams to be fulfilled, hopes to be realized. It is my prayer today for you that such is your excitement and enthusiasm as you now encounter your futures that are about to unfold.

I can't help but wonder if that excitement and enthusiasm is not somewhat sobered by the memory of the last time that many visited our little church here for the funeral of your friend and classmate Carly Imbierowicz. Even more ironic is that two of the Scriptures today speak of two young people being raised from the dead by the Prophet Elijah and by the Lord Himself.

So, as I prepared the remarks that I would share with you today, I pleaded with the Lord to make known to me what message the Lord wanted you graduates to take forth from this place.

In the first instance, Elijah had been harbored and cared for by a widow in Zarephath and her young son. Because she offered hospitality to Elijah, God spared her and her son from starving to death and protected them from the ravages of drought in the land for more than two years. Then her son grows sick and dies.

We hear her scream at the Prophet, “Why have you done this to me, O man of God? Have you come to me to call attention to my guilt and to kill my son?” The widow makes the mistake that many people then, and even now, makes in assuming that when bad things happen to them, it is a punishment from God for some past wrongdoing. It was the same mistake that his disciples made in questioning Jesus about the man born blind, begging at the city gate, “Who’s sin caused this? The man’s or his parents?” Jesus said the blindness was not caused by anyone’s sin, it happened that God may be glorified as he restores sight to the blind man. This certainly suggests to us that God seeks to bring good out of the bad things that often happen to very good people.

And so it was with the widow of Zarephath. Elijah, himself obviously distraught over the death of the boy, prays, “O Lord, my God, let the life breath return to the body of this child.” His prayer, his faith that God wants only good and not evil, does indeed give life back to the boy. The widow, because she was from Zarephath was surely not a believer in the God of Elijah, proclaims, “Now indeed I know that you are a man of god. The word of the Lord comes truly from your mouth.” And, thus, I believe that she became an evangelist for the God of Israel, telling her family and friends and neighbors how the man of the God of Israel raised her son to life again.

I submit for your consideration, my dear Graduates, that while you certainly will encounter difficult, discouraging, seemingly impossible defeating moments even in this Springtime of your lives, like this widowed mother, do not settle for those things that could drag you down. Rail against them! Refuse to give in to them! Plead your cause with the faith of Elijah to the God who gave to a mere man the power to raise the dead to life. And when God restores your joy, your enthusiasm, your excitement, and energy, make sure to glorify Him by telling everyone of his goodness to you.

Similarly, as Jesus entered the city of Nain, he encounters a widowed mother crying as she is taking her only son for burial. Jesus just had to look at this heart-broken mother and St. Luke tells us “he was moved with pity for her and said to her ‘do not weep’”. He then addresses the dead son of that mother, “Young man, I tell you, arise!” The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Again God is glorified, “God has visited his people.”

It is a terrible truth I have to tell you, dear Graduates, that, yes, even in the Springtime of your lives, as you struggle to grow, to become, to advance, you will have stumbles and falls along the way. Don’t give up! Don’t give in! Never give up! Never give in! And if these stumbles and falls happen, I say to you Parents as well, “Don’t give up on this child! Never give up!” Cry out to God with all your heart. In Jesus we see the compassion, the mercy, the loving heart of God that heard the cry of this poor, widowed Mother, mourning her dead son, and, for her, God raised him up. Would He, could He, do less for you in the stumbles and falls you may suffer in your life’s journey?

Every time you stumble, every time you fall, hear Jesus speak to you, “Young man, young woman, I tell you, arise! It matters not at all how many times you stumble or how many times you fall. Each time, listen to Jesus speak to your heart, “Young woman, young man, I tell you, arise! Each time you get up, God will indeed be glorified in you.

Finally, it is worth remembering that it was in this Church, even in the tragic circumstance of the death of Carly and Daulton, that we recognized all restraints, all barriers, all differences that inhibited the expression of love melted away, and we came to see God dwelling in our midst. As they live forever in the Springtime of their lives, may we never forget how God came and made His Presence and His Love real to us because of them.

Please know how proud I am to be your Pastor, how precious you are to me, and how much your Church Family loves you. You will always be our sons and daughters and we will always rejoice in having you come home to be with us, to pray with us, to praise and worship God with us. Never, ever forget that I love you! We love you! And God loves you too!