

Homily — 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24

2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15

Mark 5:21-43

Fr. Timothy W. Castor

Today's Gospel records a very busy and action-packed episode in our Lord's life. Surrounded by a dense crowd of people, Jesus performs two miracles— one nested within the other— both unique demonstrations of his love and divine power, and both containing important lessons for us. Jesus and his disciples are near the lakeside city of Capernaum, the town where Jesus lived and which formed the base of operations for his earthly ministry. As the passage opens, he is invited to the home of a synagogue official by the name of Jairus. This man's 12-year-old daughter is at the point of death and he begs the Lord to come and heal her. A large crowd, eager to witness this miracle, presses around Jesus as he slowly moves toward Jairus's house. But on the way, something extraordinary happens.

A very sick woman, who had lost all hope in the medical experts of the day, catches sight of the Lord and, with great difficulty, pushes her way through the crowd toward him. In the midst of her pain and suffering, a spark of faith has been ignited in her heart and she is convinced that she can steal a blessing from the Lord simply by touching the hem of his garment. She does not feel worthy to stop Jesus and to speak to him, to look him in the eyes and to frame her request. No, the Lord is too busy for her, she thinks, he is occupied with weighty matters, he is on his way to an important person's house. So, her plan is simply to sneak up behind him and, with a quick and timid touch of faith, perhaps obtain the healing she desires. Our prayer is often like this, isn't it? We're afraid of the response we might get from the Lord, and so we are reluctant even to put our request into words. But the desire is in our hearts, and the Lord knows what we need and he will always give us what is best for us and what will contribute to our salvation.

The woman's secret act of faith yields miraculous results. God has given her that gift of faith, and so God gives her as well the gift of healing. And he gives her much more besides. Her flow of blood stops immediately and she knows that the Lord has made her well. As Jesus pauses to recognize this sneak thief of grace, he treats the woman with great tenderness and love, calming her fears. He gives her the opportunity to acknowledge the gift she has received, and then he tells her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be cured of your affliction." The word translated, *be cured*, literally means to be made whole. This is important because Christ is concerned not only about our physical well-being, but about our whole being, body and soul. And so, in addition to her physical cure, Jesus gives this woman the gift of peace— a spiritual blessing— and assures her that, because of her faith, she can now enjoy complete physical and spiritual salvation.

Often this is true in our own lives: we seek the Lord asking for a little, and he gives us a lot— if only we would recognize the magnitude of his gifts.

Now Jesus continues on his way to the synagogue official's house. But his delay with the sick woman has cost the distraught father dearly. The teacher has come too late, it would seem, and the little girl has died. But was this all part of Jesus' plan? Raising a sick girl to health is one thing, raising a dead girl to life is quite another! In all probability, the Lord intended this tragedy

to enter this home precisely so that he could demonstrate the fullness of his divine power. And this he does, despite the weakness of faith around him as the people try to turn Jesus away and even laugh at him when he suggests that she is merely sleeping. With a word of love– *Talitha koum*– he takes the little girl by her hand and raises her from her deathbed, healthy, happy and full of life.

Such is the power of prayer. In each case, a request is made of the Lord– one silent and one spoken. In each case there is a mustard seed of faith– weak and imperfect. But in each case– indeed, in every case– the Lord’s power, mercy, and love far exceed our expectations. It’s important to remember, however, that the Lord did not heal all of the sick in Palestine, nor did he raise all of the dead, nor did he restore sight to all of the blind. Nor does he do so today. But he always gives to all of the faithful all that they need to live for him and to attain eternal salvation. Our part is to receive his gifts with faith and to put them into practice in our lives.

There’s one other lesson which I would like to draw from the Gospel today, and that is the prominent place of touch in these stories. The woman with the hemorrhage finds healing when she touches the garment of Jesus, Jairus’s daughter is raised from death when the Lord holds her by the hand. Indeed, throughout our Lord’s life and ministry, physical touch is very important. He touches the children who are brought to him, he touches the eyes of the blind– even on one occasion applying a salve made from earthen dust and his own spittle to the eyes of a blind man. His touch brings healing to the lame and even to the Temple guard whose ear was struck off by Peter’s sword. Finally, perhaps most importantly, is when Jesus, after he rose from the dead, invited doubting Thomas to touch the wounds in his hands and side. What is the meaning of all this touching? It might make us feel a bit uneasy, especially in this day and age when we are so rightly concerned about abusive touches which signify evil intent.

But in the case of Jesus, physical touch was the way in which he manifested his true, complete and perfect human nature. This human nature, united with his complete and perfect divine nature, is precisely what made it possible for him to heal us and to save us. This is the mystery of the Incarnation which we profess every time we recite the Creed, bowing our heads at the words, “By the power of the Holy Spirit, he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man.” It is the mystery of the Incarnation which we recognize in our devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to his most precious Body and Blood. Although he has ascended into heaven with his human and divine natures intact, he continues to remain with us in a real, physical, and even edible way, as he gives himself to us in Holy Communion.

In a lesser sense, he also remains with us in our brothers and sisters which form his mystical Body on earth. As we interact with one another, and our lives touch one another, we have the opportunity of communicating the divine power of God by allowing Christ’s love to flow through us as we treat one another with kindness, gentleness, forbearance, and charity. Or we can show ourselves to be cancerous growths in the Body of Christ through bitterness, rivalries, jealousy, and petty hatred.

The Lord Jesus continues to touch us through his Word, through the Sacrament of his most holy Body and Blood, and through our brothers and sisters. Allow his loving touch to transform your life, and then bring his love to those whose lives you touch.