



Welcome to our Eucharistic Celebration

The Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

June 28, 2015

St. Mary of the Assumption Parish

Today's Themes in Scripture

Today's readings begin with a passage from Wisdom, a book believed to have been written in the last century before the birth of Jesus. In today's reading, the author notes that God created all things, filling his creation with life, designing everything to be wholesome and good. When God formed men and women, he created them in the image of his own divine nature. He intended them to live eternally, as he does. Death was never part of God's creation. Yet when sin separated men and women from God, eternal life was lost. Cut off from God, death claimed all people.

Today's Gospel reminds us that Jesus came to restore life, but access to the life he offers is only possible through faith. In this passage, Jesus encountered two individuals: a father, who begged Jesus to prevent the death of his gravely ill daughter, and a woman whose chronic bleeding forced her into social isolation and poverty. Both had certainly heard that Jesus had healed others; if those stories were true, he was their only hope. Still, approaching Jesus was not like asking someone for a favor and hoping for a positive response. Approaching Jesus meant the man and the woman had to set aside all doubts, fear, and any pretense of having any other options. Knowing that only God could give or restore life, approaching Jesus took faith.

Jewish purity law prevented the woman from touching any man while bleeding; she risked breaking the law to reach out to Jesus. Upon touching him, she was immediately healed. Sensing her touch, Jesus looked for her and she confessed to him what she had done. Jesus assured her that her faith had brought her both healing and salvation. The father's faith in Jesus was further tested when they learned of his child's death along the way, but Jesus advised him to continue to have faith. Though it seemed too late for hope, the father continued on with Jesus to the child's room, then witnessed Jesus restore his daughter to life. When Jesus gave life to the child, he was acting on behalf of his Father, who desires to restore life to all. The Father always desires to offer healing and new life. Faith in Jesus makes that possible.

In his letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul invited them to follow the example of Jesus in giving of themselves to others. Those who have faith in Jesus, and have experienced the richness of his grace, must be life-giving to others, especially to those in need.

Sunday Readings and Backgrounds

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

God does not make death.

- The author of the Book of Wisdom gives some insight into life after death.
- The idea of resurrection began to emerge in Israel only in the final two centuries before Christ.
- Today's reading presents the idea that righteousness cannot die. Therefore, the human relationship with God cannot die.

Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11, 12, 13

I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.

Reading II: 2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15

May you abound in your work of charity.

- St. Paul encourages the Corinthian community to be generous in a collection for the poor Christians in Jerusalem.
- This kind of generosity, especially when it involves sacrifice, reveals the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- Giving to a community in need of financial support is a sign of church unity.

Gospel: Mark 5:21-43

The family's astonishment was complete!

- Jesus' miracles are a sign that the power of Satan is broken; the kingdom of God has arrived.
- The miracle in the center of today's Gospel is sandwiched between the parts of another. This is one of Mark's favorite techniques.
- One touch of Jesus' clothing and the woman with the hemorrhage is healed. The power of Satan is broken, and new life has entered the world.

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The Power of Touch

In January 2018, David Brooks of The New York Times wrote a column entitled “Now Is the Time to Talk About the Power of Touch.” In a wonderfully expressive phrase he spoke of the power of “disenchanted emotional touch,” a touch not grounded in love or commitment which, when abusive, has the power to cripple if not destroy the immeasurably positive potential of loving touch. Brooks wrote: “Emotional touch alters the heart and soul in ways that are mostly unconscious. It can take a lifetime of analysis to get even a glimpse of understanding.” There could hardly be a better introduction to today’s Gospel.

So many times when we hear this Gospel, we focus on the woman’s healing and the little girl’s resuscitation, but as Mark tells the story, those are only the backdrop to the real action. In this account, Mark mentions touching seven times. The crowd “pressed” around Jesus. The woman believed that his touch would heal and she touched Jesus. Jesus asked twice who had touched him and finally, after the father had asked him to lay hands on her, Jesus took the little girl by the hand and raised her.

Both the woman and the girl’s father believed in the power of Jesus’ touch and both received its life-giving results. Certainly, many people touched Jesus with little effect — that’s exactly what the disciples were trying to tell him when he asked who had touched him. But like a child who instinctively comprehends the emotional message of a touch, when that woman touched him, Jesus knew that someone had sought and found something desperately needed.

Jesus was never content to distribute miracles as if by magic wand or vending machine. The woman had started something when she touched him, but she had only just begun. She had used her initiative and obtained the result she sought without being aware of how small her expectations in the light of what Jesus had to offer.

The next step was for Jesus to seek her out. This may be the only time in the Gospels that Jesus sought someone he didn’t know, whom he could not call by name. When she approached him face-to-face, like so many who encountered his power, she did so in fear and trembling. Mark says that “she told him the whole truth,” implying that she explained her situation, her hope, her audacious, unlawful decision and the wondrous result it brought. For the moment that was her whole truth: She was suffering, she had hoped for a cure and received it.

Jesus’ reply opened up a new horizon for her. As he had told others, he said that her faith had saved her and she was free to go in peace, cured of her illness. But Jesus said more — something utterly extraordinary. Jesus called her “daughter.” This is the only time in Mark’s Gospel that Jesus called someone “daughter.” He had called others his mother, sisters and brothers (3:34), he addressed a paralytic as “child” (2:5) and he once called his followers “disciples” (14:14) but never before or after did he address a person as his daughter or son.

We are left to wonder what it was about her that led Jesus to call her his own in that unique way. It could have been her hope or her faith, perhaps her audacity. Each of those qualities opened her to receive life from him in what he recognized as an unprecedented way. She had started it by touching his garment in a way that touched him profoundly. He returned the gesture not by laying on hands, but by calling her “daughter,” indicating that she was receiving life from him as he did from his Father.

We hear no more about her, and are never told her name. She may have been one of the women who continued to follow Jesus, who remained to witness the crucifixion and who, Luke tells us, supported Jesus from their own means. Whatever she did, she knew that she had received life from Jesus and became as closely bound to him as a child to her parents.

We find reflections of this Gospel woman in people like Pakistani Malala Yousafzai, an activist at the age of 11 who was one of two 2014 Nobel Peace laureates when she was 17. She is also well represented by the former slave and U.S. citizen, Sojourner Truth who proclaimed, “I will not allow my life’s light to be determined by the darkness around me.”

The woman Jesus called his daughter is a representative of all people who reach out for Christ’s help, trusting that their plea will touch God and open to how the touch of God can transform them.

