

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Gospel: Mark 5:21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha kum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

REFLECTION 1:

ADAPTABILITY AND FAITH

The late Henry Nouwen, a Dutch priest was a prolific spiritual writer, whose legacy of published books is still very popular. He recounts how, pressed with the demands of teaching at Yale University, left him so exhausted that he decided to take a sabbatical at the Trappist Abbey of the Genesee in New York. His 'schedule' would consist only of prayer – no teaching or counselling, just prayer. On his second day there, a group of students from a nearby school approached him and requested that he give them a retreat. Nouwen complained to the abbot; 'I came here to get away from this kind of thing, so why should I spend my sabbatical time preparing talks to students?' 'Prepare?' the abbot asked, 'You've been a Christian for 40 years and a priest for 20 and all that these students want is to be part of your life in God for just a little while'. What the abbot knew and Nouwen learned, is that disciples of Jesus are called to live in a constant state of preparation, so that when someone who is drowning comes into our world, we are ready to reach out and help.

The Gospel for today (Mark 5: 21-43) makes it clear that Jesus came among us with an agenda. He came to announce the reign of God and to invite sinners to repent and believe the good news of salvation. He came to make known God's love, mercy and forgiveness to all. This he did with a sense

of urgency and purpose. But when he was called to depart from his daily agenda, he allowed himself that flexibility towards the needs of others that might divert him from his plotted course of action.

Mark today picks up these verbal portraits of Jesus. Immediately after the healing of a man possessed by demons, a large crowd has gathered and it would seem to be an appropriate time to develop the man's cure into a teachable moment. However at the request of a synagogue official named Jairus, Jesus willingly puts his plans on hold and looks after the man's need. Then en route to Jairus's home, Jesus is approached by yet another who craves his help. A woman who suffered a malady that rendered her ritually unclean and isolated from society touches his garment and is healed. Jesus chooses to make her experience public and to record her faith as the impetus for her healing. Then Jesus resumes his schedule and despite the news that Jairus's daughter has died, he urges Jairus to let his faith supplant his fear and proceeds to raise the girl to life.

In his willingness to set the needs of others before his own plans and desires, Jesus remains the example for all Christians. Had Jesus insisted on keeping to his own agenda, the lives of many people would have been quite different. He could have told Jairus and the woman to make an appointment and insist that his agenda not allow for distractions such as these. However Jesus knew that in healing the devastated woman of faith and raising Jairus's daughter, he was preaching a powerful and persuasive gospel for all, because he was flexible enough to do so.

In his song written for his son Sean, the late John Lennon said, 'Life is what happens when you're making other plans'. The same could be said for us. For Jesus, death was simply a sleep, which, through faith, opens on a morning of resurrection. These are challenging words that lead us to ask ourselves: how strong is our faith? Are we ready to take the leap?

REFLECTION 2: LIFE FLOW NOW

Jesus restored life to Lazarus, to the daughter of Jairus and to a widow's only son at Naim. These three stunning acts of compassion were preceded by pleas from family members. The story of Jairus' daughter is found in the three synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. The story begins with the father falling at Jesus' feet pleading for the life of his child. On his way to the dying daughter, Jesus passes by a woman who reaches out to touch his cloak. She is immediately healed of her haemorrhage. The daughter dies before Jesus gets to Jairus' house and even then Jesus restores her. Today's Gospel assures us that with prayer and our own confidence in Jesus, we too, can reach out to touch the power of Jesus, who saves when all seems lost.

The Gospel today (Mk.5:21-43) reminds me of Sandra Hook, a Canadian teacher, who was doing summer holiday work for Mother Teresa in the slums of India. One day she was asked to bathe a woman covered with sores. She shuddered at the thought. Then she recalled what Mother Teresa had said: 'When you touch the poor, touch them as though you were touching the loving Jesus.' At that moment Sandra saw the woman through the eyes of faith and had no difficulty touching her. It was this kind of childlike faith that also healed the woman in today's Gospel. I say 'childlike faith' because we remember what Jesus said when his disciples were trying to shoo children away from a busy Jesus and when Jesus saw what was happening, he uttered those amazing words, 'Unless you become like little children, you shall never enter the kingdom of God.'

At first we may think that this is too simplistic and just a throw away saying of the Master. But no, Jesus is deadly serious. He knew what was in all of us but he realized that a child has one powerful winning trait that we adults could so easily overlook. And what is that trait that so distinguishes a child? It is this. A child only lives in the present. He or she seldom reflects on the past and never daydreams into the future. A child lives in the present moment. And what Jesus was saying was a very simple truth – we can only find Jesus today, in this hour, at this very moment. When we utter the words in the Lord's

prayer, 'Thy Kingdom come' we are not referring to the Day of Judgement or even our own dying breath, we are talking about the kingdom that reigns now in each baptized living soul.

Each moment of time bears a satchel on its back freighted with the grace to live in God's presence now. Jesus is not present to us yesterday nor is he to be found in the thoughts of tomorrow – in the ways that we adults reminisce about the olden days; and the dreams of tomorrow. This God of ours is an Instant Jesus as he was to that woman with the blood complication. She touched his garment now and in that instant was restored to health. The same with Jairus' daughter, taking her by the hand Jesus said to her 'Talitha kum' – 'Little girl I tell you to get up' and at once we are told, she began to walk. If I may borrow a local pharmacist's slogan with some variation; 'Jesus is always there for you, now!'