

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK



Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time - July 2, 2006 B

ANOTHER CALL TO FAITH

Last weekend we witnessed the mighty power of Jesus as he calmed a mighty storm at sea and how he challenged his disciples to place their trust in him. In this week's gospel, Jesus takes on *sickness* and *death* and challenges all present to place their trust in him. He says: "*fear is useless, what is needed is trust.*"

While God in his infinite wisdom allows sickness and death to touch our lives and even ravage them, it should be clear from today's first and third readings that God is not on the side of sickness and death but on the side of health and life. In our first reading today, we hear these words:

*God did not make death,
nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living
. . . God formed man to be imperishable. . .
But by the envy of the devil death
entered the world
and those who belong in his company experience it.*

In today's gospel we have a concrete sign of God at work in Jesus showing himself to be very much on the side of life and wellness. The gospel dovetails two stories, both filled with emotion.

The little girl at the point of death

Jairus, a leader at the synagogue comes pleading to Jesus. He falls at the feet of Jesus. This demanded much *courage, humility* and *vulnerability*. As a leader of the Synagogue, you can be sure that Jairus' peers did not want him to go to Jesus. After all Jesus was regarded as a heretic. They may have begged him not to go see Jesus. This may also be true of his family. Notice no one came to Jesus with Jairus. He came alone. Falling at the feet of Jesus also demanded humility and vulnerability. If we are proud people and tend to keep our feelings in tight check, we would have a very difficult time coming to someone and falling down at their feet begging them to help us. But if we are really hurting we may surprise ourselves at what we would be willing to do. This is especially true when the one in need is "daddy's little girl".

As we read this part of today's Gospel, we may be led to remember in prayer parents who daily deal with the heavy burden of a sick child who may have some incurable disease. Many such parents are wonderful people. The demands on their lives are extreme. Let us

also remember in prayer parents who have lost a child in an accident or through sickness, war or hunger.

The woman with a long term illness

Jesus agrees to go to Jairus' house. As he travels a large crowd follows him. Among them was a nameless woman who had a bleeding problem for twelve years. She went to every doctor in town. None could help her. Jesus may have been her last chance, It seems the woman was ashamed of her condition. She did not want a face to face encounter with Jesus. She thought "If only I could touch the hem of his garment, I would be healed." It was a common belief in those days that touching the clothes of a holy man could bring a healing.

The woman thought she could touch Jesus, get cured and go back to her life. Jesus had other plans. He wanted to encounter her face to face. He wanted a relationship. Sometimes people come to Jesus for help, get what they wanted and return to life without in any way changing their relationship with God.. For Jesus the greatest of all cures is the healing of our relationship with God. The worst disease is the disease of sin that wounds our soul and relationship with God, the wound that leads us to believe God does not love us or care about us. You can imagine how easy it would be for a person with a long term illness to believe God doesn't love them and care about them.

"Who touched me?"

After the woman touched him, Jesus felt 'power leave him'. People involved in the healing ministry often say how draining it is physically, emotionally and spiritually. Reflecting on today's Gospel, Fr. Flor McCarthy writes: "*Healing can be exhausting and painful for the healers. The healing act itself is often an occasion of suffering. We can't take away suffering without somehow to some degree entering into it, if only by listening to the pain of the sufferer.*"

In response to Jesus' question about who touched him, the disciples say: "Master, everyone is touching you". But Jesus is really asking: 'Who touched me with *faith*? Who came believing in my power to heal.' Jesus' power and the woman's faith combined to heal the woman.

Sometimes Catholic preachers like to connect this story with the sacraments. As Catholics we believe and

teach that sacraments are not empty rituals but *encounters* with the living Christ. Our challenge is to come to the sacraments with the faith of the nameless woman in today's gospel. Our challenge is to believe that in the celebration of a sacrament, Jesus is reaching out to us to touch our lives in some way. We may not feel his touch, but in and through faith we should believe he has come to us with his healing mercy, strength etc.

After the woman *faced* Jesus, she fell down before him in homage. He said to her "*Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace.* . . . "We can be sure the woman's life was forever changed physically and spiritually. If she had gotten away without encountering Jesus face to face, she may have been healed physically but not spiritually. There was also a social dimension to her healing. Because of her blood problems, the woman was considered ritually unclean and not allowed to actively participate in Synagogue services. Now she was restored to the community. Many people with a severe illness often experience social isolation. This has to be a great cross to bear especially for those who are extraverts and love to be with people.

In the meantime back at the ranch . . .

After healing the woman, people from Jairus' house came and delivered the devastating news: "Your daughter has died." One thinks of thousands of people who must hear those words daily "Your loved one has died."

But the bearers of the bad news had no idea that Jesus was going to demonstrate his power over death. As he went he challenged Jairus to have faith. When he arrives at the house, he chases out all the mourners and chases death out of the little girl. Those who moments earlier ridiculed Jesus for saying the little girl was only asleep, now have egg all over their face. Now they are "utterly astounded" at the healing power of Jesus.

Both stories not only manifest the power of God over sickness and death, but they also call us to place our faith in Jesus. One wonders what stops us from placing our *total* trust in Someone who can quiet a huge storm, heal where medicine had miserably failed and raise a dead child to life. What could keep us from totally placing our trust in such a person? I'm not sure. But my guess is fear - fear of letting go, fear of losing control, even though the control we think we have is a big illusion. Everything we have could be taken from us at any moment of the day - health, loved ones etc.

A final point on the gospel. It is important to notice that both Jairus and the woman sought out Jesus. They

didn't just sit at home and wait for a miracle to happen. Both took an assertive posture to resolve their predicament.

St. Paul's Collection: Supporting the Missions and Peter's Pence

Reaching out beyond our own parish is a tradition going back to Apostolic times. In our readings today, Paul is organizing a special second collection amongst the Corinthians to help the poor in Jerusalem. He gives some powerful reasons why the Corinthians should participate in the collection.

- Be generous as Jesus has been generous to you. He gave his life for us that we might enjoy eternal life. Giving of our time, treasure and talent to others is the most concrete way we can express *gratitude* to God for his blessings to us. It is one thing to say "Thank you, thank you Lord for health, family, and financial blessings" etc. But, I believe that the 'thank you' that will most impress the Lord is a generous sharing of our blessings. It is one very concrete way for us to LIVE Eucharist - which means to give thanks.
- The second reason Paul gives has to do with *equality*. It is not God's plan that some of his children live in great wealth while others live in great poverty. Paul says: "*Your abundance at this present time should supply their needs, so that their abundance may also supply your needs*". In others words, it only makes sense that those who have more than enough should share with those who have less than enough. Paul reminds us that we who live in abundance may one day have the tables turned on us. Someday we may be the needy ones. Paul is asking us to bring about a time where abundance and need meet common ground, where people have neither too much nor too little.

Most of us will never go on a mission trip to another part of the world. But we can support those who serve in poor countries like Fr. Pogula Raja, who spoke to us today. Or we can serve the wonderful outreach of the Warwicks who serve the poor in Haiti and Jamaica and take young people on mission trips. Two weeks from this Sunday, Tim Kantz will speak at the Masses. Tim is the young man I visited in Guatemala.

Also, those of us who receive monthly package of envelopes had a chance today to support the Charity work of the Holy Father. The Holy Father uses donations collected through the *Peter's Pence collection* to support poverty stricken dioceses and Christian humanitarian work. In recent years

donations from Peter's Pence have, among many other things, assisted indigenous farming communities in Latin America and have helped to fight drought and desertification in Africa and natural disasters. In the last ten years U.S. Catholics have contributed \$175 million to the Peter's Pence collection.

Happy Birthday America

Today we celebrate our nation's independence. The 13 colonies of 1776 have grown to a mighty nation of 50 states. America is seen as the leading world power. We have been greatly blessed. It is a blessing to live under her protection, democracy and wealth. We enjoy freedoms only dreamed of in other nations. We are grateful to those who have fought and died to preserve our freedoms. However, are we not turning our backs to the God who has blessed us? Morality is at a low ebb: embryonic stem cell research, assisted suicide, abortion, drug, alcohol and gambling abuse, a widening gap between the "haves" and the "have nots." How long will God endure it? With our blessings come responsibilities for us as individuals and as a nation.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

"It is the duty of citizens to contribute along with the civil authorities to the good of society in a spirit of truth, justice, solidarity, and freedom. The love and service of one's country follow from the duty of gratitude and belong to the order of charity. Submission to legitimate authorities and service of the common good require citizens to fulfill their roles in the life of the political community . . .

"The citizen is obliged in conscience not to follow the directives of civil authorities when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order, to the fundamental rights of persons or the teachings of the gospel. Refusing obedience to civil authorities, when their demands are contrary to those of an upright conscience, finds its justification in the distinction between serving God and serving the political community." #2239 & 2242

A Thank You from Genesis House

Last week I received the following Thank You letter from Genesis House. It is certainly a local organization that does good work reaching out to women in bad

situations.

Dear Fr. Tobin and Parishioners,

Thank you for your participation in our Mother's Day fund raiser. We received \$3,195 this year from this fund raiser. Your donations will be used to help the many homeless mothers with children, the student mothers and their children, and the pregnant women who reside in our three shelter homes.

Our three shelter homes stay busy. We are pleased with the progress our residents make once they are in our safe, supportive environment. We have three wonderful, caring House Managers who encourage all their residents to start improving their lives by going to school and finding jobs. We have many success stories. Many former residents keep in touch at least once a year. They send photos of their children and let us know how they are doing. One former resident came to us pregnant at age 17. She had not finished high school. She was encouraged to get her GED and go on to Brevard Community College. After her baby girl was born she moved to Genesis House II and continued in college. She then moved, got married and continued in college. She became a Certified Public Accountant. She now has three children.

Another former resident came to Genesis House pregnant, angry and thinking she was stupid. After eight sessions with our counselor, she opened up and talked about her upbringing. She was encouraged to get her GED and continue on to college. She realized that she was smart. She is devoted to her son who is a strait A student. She graduated from UCF last year and is now a teacher.

Thank you for helping us provide good caring shelter homes for the many women and children who come to us for shelter. As a supporter of Genesis House you play a big part in helping our residents move forward in a positive direction with their lives.

Vonnie Marian
Administrator

Have a wonderful week,

