



ANOTHER CALL TO FAITH

Last weekend, we witnessed the mighty power of Jesus as he calms a mighty storm at sea and challenges 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 reading 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 demands much *courage, humility* and *vulnerability*. You can be sure that Jairus' peers do not want him, a leader of the synagogue, to go to Jesus. After all, Jesus is 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 comes with Jairus; he comes alone. Falling at the feet of Jesus also demands humility and vulnerability. If we are proud people who tend to keep our feelings in tight check, we would find it very difficult to approach someone and fall down at his/her feet begging for help. 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 suffering from some incurable disease. Many such parents are wonderful people though 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 is a nameless woman who has had a bleeding problem for twelve years. She has been to every doctor in town but no one can help her. Jesus may have been her last chance. It seems the woman is ashamed of her condition. She does not want a face-to-face encounter with Jesus. She thinks, "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 healing.

The woman thinks she can touch Jesus, get cured and go back to her life. Jesus has other plans. He wants to encounter her face to face. He wants a relationship. Sometimes, people come to Jesus for help, get what they want, 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 that 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 that God does not love or care about him/her.

"Who touched me?"

After the woman touches him, Jesus feels "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 as to who touched him, the disciples reply: "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.

As the woman faces Jesus, she falls down before him in homage. He says to her: "Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace." We can be sure the woman's life is forever changed physically and spiritually. If she had gotten away without encountering Jesus face to face, she might have been healed physically but not spiritually. There was also a social dimension to her healing. Because of her blood problems, the woman is considered ritually unclean and not allowed to actively participate in synagogue services. Now she is 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 extroverts and love to be with people.

In the meantime, back at the ranch ...

After the woman's healing, people from Jairus' house come and deliver 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 have no idea that Jesus is going to demonstrate his power over death. As he goes, he challenges 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. They now become "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 has miserably failed, and raise a dead child to life. What could keep us from totally placing our trust in such a God? 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 note 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

Reaching out beyond our own parish is a tradition going back to Apostolic times. In our second reading today, Paul organizes a special second collection amongst the Corinthians to help the poor in Jerusalem.

Paul tells the Corinthians that they should share in this collection because they have been blessed. The best way to thank God for his blessings is by sharing them with others.

Two weeks ago, you did that in a very powerful way when you participated in Fr. Doug Doussan's special collection for his parish. It came to \$15,000 to which we have added \$10,000 from our parish tithe. Fr. Doug is most grateful for your generosity. This is his gratitude letter.

Dear Fr. Tobin & Ascension Catholic Community,

I am writing to thank you for the warm reception you gave me on my recent visit to Ascension Catholic Community. You were very attentive to my message at all the celebrations of the Eucharist and showed great concern and sympathy for the plight of the people of St. Gabriel parish because of the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.

Fr. Eamon has just notified me that the collection for St. Gabriel was \$15,000. That is unbelievable! You are so generous and we are so grateful. In addition to this, Fr. Eamon said he was sending us another \$10,000 from the parish tithe. I can't find words to express our gratitude.

I enjoyed your wonderful celebrations of the Eucharist and am so impressed with your generous services to those in need, both at home and abroad. You shall indeed be blessed for your goodness.

Your pastor will be in my prayers that he may be sustained in good health so that he can continue his dedicated services to you.

With much gratitude,

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Have a blessed week,

