

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time cycle B

Most of us have probably experienced, at some point or other in our lives, profound weakness. My turn came on the weekend when I had to get my last apartment that I had before seminary cleaned up and cleared out for the next tenants. I remember mostly being too fatigued to move, not just tired, but fatigued: I had some ailment which had rendered me completely weakened. No nausea, no pain; just a slight fever, and no strength. I remember getting to the apartment to work on the clean up, and having to lie down on the floor just from the five minute drive there, lying there telling myself that I had to get something done, anything, even if only taking out one bag of garbage. I told myself that I had to get up—but my arms and legs weren't taking orders from my brain. Instead, I rested for about an hour, and then used what strength I had built up to drive back to my parent's house; I didn't know how I would get it all done or what I would do, since we only had one more day to get out of there. It was the only time in my life that I have felt that overwhelming weak; and with that experience in mind, I can only imagine the weakness which would have been associated with the people in today's Gospel. How weak Jairus' daughter must have felt as she clung to life there towards the end, the voices around her starting to fade, physically too weak to even reach out to loved ones at the last; and the woman with the hemorrhage, how exhausted she must have been after so many years of her ailment, how it must have taken everything, every ounce of strength that she had, to even reach out and barely touch Jesus' cloak.

In both stories from Mark's Gospel, sin had taken its toll on both the young girl and the woman. It's never indicated that their afflictions were punishments of any sort; this is true of most of our ailments. They aren't always a result of cause and effect; perhaps sometimes, but not always. Some pain we do bring upon ourselves, but many afflictions are the result of *mankind's* condition, the result not only of sin in his own life and in his own soul, but of original sin in his life and in his world. The Bible makes clear that man, not God, invited sin into the world; as it says in the book of Wisdom, "God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living." But death is a reality now because of Adam's sin, it is the natural progression of a broken-down, deteriorating world. But as happened to the two *victims of the effects of sin* whom we read about today, before sin takes its final toll, its power is halted when Jesus intervenes. Power goes out from him, and touches the young girl and the woman. In the case of the woman with the hemorrhage, it is his power and her faith which repudiate the effects of sin, repudiate the illness which had brought her so much pain and disrupted her life for so long, and which undoubtedly left her weakened, left with perhaps only with the strength to approach Jesus for this cure; twelve years is a long time. Jesus, aware that power had gone out from him, turned around

in the crowd and asked “who touched me?” And when he found out, he did not chastise the woman for her actions, because her actions were very bold; being in the condition she was in, she would have been considered ritualistically unclean and her touch therefore unclean. But our Lord does not ask “why did you do that,” or even “why did you not ask for a cure?” He tells her, your faith has saved you. His power, her faith, a combination which is the knock-out punch for the evil which had bedeviled her for twelve years. Then he reaches Jairus’ daughter, and this time his power is so strong that it draws back the girl’s soul to her body; the many witnesses testify that she had already clearly died. But Jesus’ power is enough to draw her back, so that when Jesus says “little girl, arise,” she must do so. Death is not of God; the power to overcome death and to overcome evil is what is of God. Jesus and Jesus alone among man has the ability to turn back the effects of sin, effects which have found their way to all men, but which can still be conquered through Christ.

There are two different kinds of death, physical and spiritual. Physical death occurs, we know, when blood stops circulating in the body; that’s how we gauge the end of life. The body remains dead at the end of this life until the next coming of Christ, when he promised that all the faithful would share in his resurrection. But the other death is even more scary, the spiritual death; that occurs when the divine life which we received at baptism is renounced by our sins, when that flame of faith is willfully blown out by an individual’s actions. Both of these, however, can be turned back by the power of Jesus. And right now, our biggest concern should be the spiritual death; turning back the physical death will occur at the Lord’s coming, as I said, and whether we rise to eternal life or eternal death is being determined now, and so the spiritual death is doubly dangerous, as it seals as well our future physical state. Mortal sin is that sin which is so serious that it cuts us off from God; but Jesus’ power, and our faith, are enough to bring God’s life back to our souls. When we are dead in sin, Jesus still says to us “arise.” He says it in the graces that lead us to continue praying, even if not in a state of grace; he says it in the promptings which urge us to go to confession and be reconciled with him; and he says it mostly in the sacrament itself, when he speaks his words of absolution through the priest. These words are not part of the ritual, but they are certainly part of the reality: he tells us, in essence, to arise, and return to our lives, return to our spiritual lives lived in accord with his will, the only kind of life which can bring us lasting peace and everlasting happiness in heaven.

The sacraments, by Jesus’ design, touch the senses, whether the sense of touch or taste or hearing; and when they are celebrated, Jesus’ power goes out to us through them. The sacraments are his touch; prayer and reflection on Scripture become his word, through which he tells us to be cured, and to rise up. It is in confession that he tells us to arise; it is at communion when he reiterates

that your faith has saved you. It is through this system of word and ritual that his power goes out now, just as it once did through his cloak and through his touch; and because they contain the power to cleanse us and to change us, they are not empty rituals consisting of mere words; they are the sign to us of God's power at work in our midst, helping us to turn back from that which threatens us with the most dangerous death, that is, the spiritual death which occurs through sin. Whether we approach Jesus in our weakness, or if we approach him after we've passed from weakness to spiritual death, his power is still enough to revive us. But, we must seek him out. We must go to him, as a sign that, like the woman with the hemorrhage, we want his healing power sent upon us; as a sign that we have grown tired of our afflictions, and that we will do whatever it takes to be made whole. Jesus told the woman, and he tells us, that what it takes to be healed is to be willing to approach him in faith.

Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians that Jesus, although he was rich, for our sake became poor. The wealth that Jesus possessed was the riches of heaven; the poverty he endured was the human experience of contending with life in the physical realm. He set aside his glory in order that his glory might be shown to, and one day shared by, us. One day, we will be rich *as Jesus was rich* before he came and be rich as he is again: we may possess heaven, if we will take full use of his power now. One day, physical death will also be transformed, but right now the threat of spiritual death begs us to admit our weakness, and draw from his power. Some times, we only need our Lord to tell us to get up, because we have the strength. Sometimes, we need him to tell us to get going, because we had the strength to get up but not the courage or the wisdom to be moving. Sometimes, though, we are so weak that it seems that we just can't get up and get going; so mired in sin that we can't turn away from it, can't resist it when it presents itself. And it is at these times especially when Jesus tells us to get up. It is at these times in particular when we need his strength in us. Physically, many of us have probably at one time or another hit that point that I did the weekend needed the strength to clear out an apartment, but just did not have the strength to get up and get going. If ever we reach that point spiritually, or for that matter whenever we've come to realize that sin has again taken its toll on our soul, may we avail ourselves to Jesus once again, through prayer and especially through his sacramental touch. Feel the power go out from him again; listen, and respond, as he tells us once more, "arise. Your faith has saved you."

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