

HOMILY 13th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME 2021
FROM POWER OVER FORCES OF NATURE TO COMPASSION
HEALING TWO WOMEN

Mk 5.21-43 Wis 1.13-2.24 2Cor 8.7-15 Rhyme Bible "A Sick Girl" (Mark 5)

And now it's up to double last week at now 150 maximum at a time, for Mass, while continuing to provide a virtual link to our celebration of Eucharist on the parish website, but you still must record your attendance on QR code on entry.

Last weekend we had the story of Jesus' power of the forces of nature and chaos and darkness. Now we move to the human dimension of his ministry in the call to faith from fear and anxiety, to hope and healing. For some reason, the lectionary omits the story in between of the Gadarene swine or pigs, where Jesus drives out the demons from the man possessed, and the pigs head into the lake, never to return! I've always felt sorry for the pig farmer, obviously non-Jewish, as pigs and so pork were considered unclean and forbidden for Jewish consumption. Perhaps more significantly, the symbolism is about the uncleanness being overcome and driven away. Nevertheless, it's a story of healing and the afflicted man coming good and settling down within himself, his anxieties and internal disturbance gone away.

We move from Job's woes and ultimate restoration of his hopes, happiness and good fortune in life, after facing up to his losses and realizing God's presence and power through his darkest times, wrestling with life being unfair at times. The Book of Wisdom reflects on the one of the certainties of life, along with taxes and change, that being the reality of death and so, facing our mortality. Dark as the theme is, there are words of hope and life continuing with a loving God, beyond the human scene in which we find ourselves. At the same time, it is our mission to live life well as faithful disciples.

When she was 96 and staying with me here and coming to weekday Mass, and often enough the coffins would be being wheeled in afterwards, my only, now late, aunt Betty, asked me if I didn't find all the funerals I had to do as a priest depressing, no doubt pleased that she was still doing pretty well for her age at that stage. I had to say not really, because, sad as it is to say goodbye with the finality of death, there is a certain peace of mind and sense of gratitude and acceptance that comes from acknowledging and celebrating a long and fulfilling life well lived, as well as our Christian faith giving us hope in eternal life with God, with the images of light, happiness and peace.

Not so easy is dealing with tragedy and loss at an earlier age, where life is cut short, seemingly so unfair and deeply saddening. It was only in May that I got to Sydney to be with friends who had lost their 35 year old daughter Kate, from a ravaging cancer, within a month of the safe delivery of her second child. The farewell was deeply moving and sad, leaving us wondering why such things can happen? There was no miracle here, just a sense of sadness and loss, even anger. There are no simple answers and there's no turning back, except to treasure the memories and continue the friendship and contact with the bereaved.

We often don't know what others have been through. Today's Gospel must be particularly painful for those of you parents who have lost a child, however long ago, naturally asking where was Jesus when we suffered the grief of tragedy and loss in our lives?

Jesus' itinerant mission is on the go, and here we have a very human situation, an encounter with two females, one young and suddenly stricken with serious illness, and one older, who has suffered for many years. It is still early in Jesus' ministry, but nothing stops him from breaking the taboos of the time. The orthodoxy of the day was for women to be seen and not heard, and certainly not to be touched, but Jesus is unaffected by such niceties, to the chagrin of the religious authorities, except in this case, where Jairus, who is one of the synagogue officials, or *temple police*, as I like to call them, has only his daughter's welfare at heart. In this case, Jesus has no hesitation in responding to Jairus, as a loving father. In desperation, and out of love and concern for his daughter, he pleads with Jesus to come to his home.

In between, Mark uses what the scholars call a sandwich device, telling the story about the older woman, who anonymously reaches out to Jesus, demonstrating her secret faith in him that even an unknown touch will bring

her healing, which it does here. It's a demonstration of the divine power which resides in Jesus, who senses her presence and insists on her self-identification. He commends her for her faith and sends her in peace.

It might be a nice story, but behind it is the way Jesus makes no judgement about her condition being a punishment by God for imagined wrongs committed, as was the custom of the time. The view of genetic transmission of sin, guilt and punishment was not even addressed by him, but rather cast aside, as compassion and concern for the individual, rules as Jesus' primary focus. Her long-term 12 year affliction marked her as ritually unclean, but the latter was of no concern to Jesus. Added to her physical pain, would have also been the fact of her being socially excluded from normal interaction with family and friends, as she was considered unclean, unclean and so isolated and lonely.

Added to this is Jesus' obvious determination to reach out to all who are afflicted in body, mind or spirit, and offer encouragement, forgiveness and hope. But mortality can't be eliminated nor every individual healed by Jesus. His mission continues through our response to applying the principles of the Gospel to our lives and in the way we reach out to those who are afflicted in our world, where you and I can and must make a difference.

Conclude with my MSC friend Claude Mostowik's insight for today: *"There are no worthy or unworthy, or winners and losers for Jesus... We are all loved; we all get new chances at life... All seek help, peace, comfort, acceptance and welcome. Jesus does not talk about dignity or indignity, acceptance or non-acceptance; welcome or rejection, but radiates healing through his love."* And so should we reflect that love in word and action.

john hannon

27th June 2021