



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

Homily

[*Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24; Psalm 30; 2Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15; Mark 5:21-43*]

On July 1st pandemic restrictions will be lifted. Like you, I have noticed a range of reactions to this. Many can't wait and will resume what was once normal activity; a good number of others, though, are nervous and will remain somewhat guarded for a time yet. One particular area where this divergent response will be clearly visible is in respect of physical distancing. We have become accustomed to keeping our distance from one another. It will be a while before many people feel comfortable being close to another, including here in the church, something to which we shall all need to be sensitive as we respect one another's needs.

I suggest that this idea of discomfort with proximity is a useful background against which to set today's Gospel passage from St. Mark. The miracles it recounts are familiar to us, possibly so much so that we hear them without giving them due attention. But there are some challenging questions posed to us by what is narrated. Placing the Gospel text against the backdrop of our current circumstances surfaces these questions, which perhaps we might not otherwise perceive, and that lead us into a close examination of our own personal relationship with Jesus Christ. As we consider the text closely, we can discern a call to look carefully at any attitudes or assumptions that might actually be keeping us distant from the Lord and his saving power, hesitant to draw near to him.

The healing stories in today's Gospel recount how two people in need overcame their habitual physical distancing, and drew very close to Jesus, without fear or hesitation. Jairus, the synagogue official, held a lofty position within the local community of faith. His distancing from other people would likely have manifested itself in maintaining a dignified bearing in the presence of others. Yet, with his daughter at home dying, he overcomes that distance by casting aside any concern for the good opinion of others and humbles himself before the compassion and power of Jesus. The woman suffers from an illness that renders her ritually unclean, forced to distance herself not only from physical contact with others but also from communal worship. But in her need for the Lord's healing power, she reaches across the gap, closes the distance, heedless of ritual law, to touch the cloak of the Lord.

Their example prompts some questions for us. Do I distance myself from Christ and the act of witnessing to my faith out of concern for how I might be perceived by others? Does a sense of unworthiness, or the burden of guilt, or any ostracism I might experience from others keep me distant from the Lord?

As we ponder these questions, let's note carefully *why* the official and the woman reached out to the Lord. They were each dealing with impossible situations, issues beyond any human capacity to resolve. The daughter of the official was dead; the woman's illness could not be cured by doctors. Yet

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they each somehow sensed that there was a healing and restorative power operative in Jesus that could be found nowhere else. Awareness of their extreme need and recognition of Jesus as the answer moved them to overcome the physical distancing and draw close to him.

From these considerations arises the question that is fundamental to our entire life of faith: do I recognize the divinity of Jesus Christ and admit my absolute need for him? The foundation of Christian faith is the recognition that Jesus is the Son of God, who became a human being to save us. Impossible situations are present in everyone's life: problems that defy resolution; an offense I cannot forgive; a wayward son or daughter I can no longer reach; and so on. Do I really believe that Jesus has the power to change things? Or, in other words, do I truly accept that he is God, for whom nothing is impossible? Is it weakness of faith that keeps me distant from him, fixated instead on my problems, and trying to work it all out on my own?

Whatever our difficulty, or however weak our faith, the Gospel text today encourages us not to lose hope. Notice that both Jairus and the woman were able to overcome physical distancing and go to Jesus because he had first drawn close to them. He took the initiative, crossing the lake to where they were, and thus made it possible for them to find him. He does the same for us today, by coming to us in the sacraments. The faith of the Church teaches that the power once present in the earthly body of Jesus has now passed into the sacraments he gave us. When we celebrate the sacraments, we touch his body, just as the woman did as she sought his healing, and, like her, receive his power (cf. CCC, 1115-1116).

So, especially now as we celebrate the Eucharist, the greatest of all the sacraments, let us ask for the grace to overcome any distancing from Christ born of fear. He says to us what he said to Jairus: "Do not fear, only believe." With faith in his divine power and unconditional love, let us without hesitation go to him, draw close, and experience for ourselves the joy of his saving help.

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