

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
(Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24 / Mark 5:21-43)
27.06.2021

Many people have great difficulty admitting to their suffering. They don't like to concede that they have a problem. They prefer to hide their ills and mask their pain. When it comes to mental illness, emotional turmoil, psychological distress and spiritual malaise, they can be reticent to turn to another for support. How often we ourselves hesitate to ask for the help *we* need. We can shy away from confiding ourselves to another. Out of fear, guilt or shame, we may hold back from presenting ourselves before the Lord in prayer, just as we are... It is not good when we ignore what is going on deep within us or fail to seek the help we need to deal with the difficulties that assail us.

Often what holds us back from confiding ourselves to others – and even to the Lord in honest prayer – is fear: fear of being judged, or even turned away. Ashamed of some of the issues we grapple with – issues often beyond our control – we presume that if anyone was aware of our struggles they would reject us.

But surely the real issue here is our own self-judgment. How harsh it can be! It can make of us our own worst enemies. So many of our difficulties stem from our poor or indeed, negative self-image. This can leave us feeling that the Lord must be repelled by us. Nothing could be further from the truth. When the Lord sees misery, He wants to show mercy. When He sees suffering, His heart is moved to compassion. His deepest longing and desire is to release those who hold themselves captive; it is to set them free from sin and also from self-rejection.

Self-loathing is an ill which afflicts so many. We find it hard to appreciate ourselves, let alone truly love ourselves. In Bernanos' famous novel, *The Journal of a Country Parish Priest*, we read a line which rings so true: *It is much easier to hate oneself than one might think.*

All that to say that I suspect many of us resemble the haemorrhaging woman we meet in today's gospel passage. Like her, we may feel ashamed of ourselves, because of some ill that plagues us. Like her, we may be inclined to think of ourselves as unclean. Like her, perhaps we withdraw in craven fear before the Lord when this is the last thing He wants us to do.

This woman who had been bleeding for twelve years was considered impure according to the precepts of Jewish law. Thus, anyone who touched her or came into contact with her would have been considered contaminated. The woman's chronic haemorrhaging was probably caused by some natural gynaecological illness. While this caused her to be viewed as ritually unclean, it would be utterly wrong to conclude, as did the woman herself, and others around her, that her suffering left her cut off from God.

Given the precepts of the Levitical Law, we can understand that the haemorrhaging woman shied away from making a direct approach to the Lord, but look at what happened when she found the courage to approach Him... if only from behind, touching the hem of His garment. The Master immediately noticed her timid approach and responded. Powerfully! *A power went out of Him.* Is it not consoling to see how sensitive Jesus was – recognising the effort this woman made to reach out to Him at all... even in timid hesitation.

I am sure there are important lessons for us in the story of the healing of this suffering woman – as also in the healing story of Jairus' daughter in which it is inserted. What we are shown in both is that Jesus finds ways of reaching out to us in compassion, and powerfully. Even when we

hesitate or draw back in fear. Jesus connects with us. A current of His grace is directed towards us. To experience His compassion all we need do is take a simple trusting step towards Him and ask Him to help us.

Both stories heard in this Gospel passage show us that we should never allow our pride, fear, shame, or whatever else, to hold us back from approaching the Lord. Our Lord is always ready to heal us. And here, I am not thinking mainly of the healing of our physical complaints, but of our emotional scars, psychological ills, and especially the sickness of sin which debilitates all of us. The Lord can and will heal our wounded memories and our broken hearts; He will restore our lives... if only we trust Him. Even when we draw back – even when we are shy of coming forward and presenting ourselves before Him as we are, preferring to approach Him sideways – we will find that the Lord is already coming out to meet us. All we need to do is to take one step in His direction. When we do, His grace will enter our innermost being to transform our lives from within.

The Lord is waiting for us today – waiting for you and for me – to reach out to Him. He will give us what we long for most: life. True life! Life in abundance!

The important thing is for us to place all our trust and hope in Him, just as we see this ailing woman do, and Jairus, that loving parent.

Just a word about Jairus' humility and his love.

Here we have a leader among the Jewish people daring to turn to Jesus in faith and ask for help. Jairus knew he risked ridicule and scorn from his peers for humbling himself before Jesus, but Jairus's love for his daughter was so great that he was willing to run that risk and follow his faith instinct. He trusted in Jesus, believing the Master would help his daughter live.

If only such loving trust inspired us and the same humility of heart! Then we too would be led to know such healing, refreshment and restoration as our wounded hearts long for... and how *our* lives would be recreated, made new.

As we approach the Lord's Table this morning, we will humbly confess that we are not worthy to receive Him. At the same time, we will affirm our faith that the Lord has only to say the word and we shall be healed.

Let us welcome Christ as He stoops down to us in this Eucharist.

To use an image found in the prophet Hosea, here the Lord lifts us up close to Himself to nourish us with His love.

Amen!