

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time + 30 June 2024 + Wis 1:13-2:24 + Mk 5:21-43

When I was in the seminary, I learned a very helpful method of studying Scripture. It's simple, anyone can do it, and it only involves 3 steps. Step 1: always ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you meditatively read the passage. Step 2: as you read, ask the question, what does this passage reveal about who God is? And step 3: based on the revelation of God in the passage, then ask, how is He calling you to respond?

So let's apply this method to our Gospel today, where we hear Mark recount 2 different but interrelated miracle events. As we ask the question, *what do these 2 stories reveal to us about God*, I think it is quite reasonable to conclude that a.) God has the power to heal us, and b.) He *does* heal us when we ask Him, according to His will. Now, if your mind has already jumped ahead to the inevitable question about why God heals some and not others, hold on to that thought for a moment. As always, we first want to dig deeper, and see what else we can learn about the person of Jesus Christ.

For our next take-away, it is helpful to know a little about the Jesus' Jewish background, and go back to the Old Testament. In the book of Leviticus, we hear of numerous laws related to ritual purity. In a nutshell, these laws spelled out what actions or bodily conditions would render a person "unclean", and so unable to participate in the corporate worship of Israel. Read with today's eyes, we might find these laws to be antiquated, or even cruel. However, from a pragmatic standpoint, many of the laws were simply good ways to prevent disease in a pre-scientific culture. Remember, until roughly 100 years ago, something as minor in today's terms as the flu, could very likely prove deadly. Even more, we need only to consider the popularity of hand sanitizer today to realize that we are not all that different than the ancients.

Anyway, 2 of the rules for ritual purity for the Jewish people are important to today's Gospel. First, the fact that the woman had a perpetual flow of blood for 12 years means that for that whole period, she was ritually unclean. She couldn't take part in communal worship, most of her home would be considered unclean, and if she was married, she couldn't have relations with her husband without rendering him unclean. So this woman was very likely a complete social outcast. Even more, we learn that she was penniless, and only made to suffer all the more at the hands of incompetent doctors. Her physical, emotional, and mental suffering would have been unimaginable.

In a similar way, the book of Leviticus tells us that anyone outside of the immediate family who touched a dead body would become unclean. So what does all of this have to do with Jesus? Well, recall that the unclean woman touches Jesus, and her flow of blood ceases. And then Jesus touches the dead girl, and she rises from the dead. In both of these cases,

according to Levitical Law, Jesus is rendered unclean. But in fact, the reverse happens; not only is Jesus unaffected, but even more, both of the women whom He touches are healed.

How is possible? Well, this is our next take-away: that in Jesus, the Old Covenant purity Laws, meant to teach the people the right way to worship the living and true God, become obsolete. And that is because He Himself is *Immanuel*, God with Us. He is the true temple, not in Jerusalem, but right there, wherever He is; in our Gospel today, probably in Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee. As we hear in our 1st reading today from the Book of Wisdom, the devil and sin have disfigured all of creation, and causing people to live in constant fear of disease and death. But Jesus has power over all creation, because He is the Creator *and* the Redeemer. He has come to heal us, and to restore all of creation. Even more, we see in these episodes that He has deep compassion on all who fall victim to the effects of sin—often not their own sin, but what we might call “corporate sin”—the sins of all humanity. So He tells the woman to *go in peace*. ‘Peace’ is His desire for all of us.

So now let’s jump to Bible study Step 3: based on this revelation of who Jesus is, how am I called to respond? Well, that’s a question that only you can answer, but all of us need healing from something. Maybe it’s from painful memories. Maybe it’s bitterness, anger, abuse, addiction, broken families, physical or mental illness. Whatever it is, what does the Gospel today teach us about the proper way to seek healing from Jesus?

First, faith: we see both in Jairus and in the woman an extraordinary faith in Jesus’ power to heal. If we want to be healed, we must believe that Jesus can heal us, if He so wills it. Second, humility: we must be willing to humble ourselves, admit that we are powerless on our own, and ask Jesus to heal us. Both Jairus and the woman fall at the feet of Jesus, disregarding what others might think of how they look. Humility also includes repentance, to change any ways of our lives that are not in according with God’s will. This is why so often when Jesus heals, He says something to the effect of, *go and sin no more*. Third: patience. Like the woman with the hemorrhage, we must be willing to wait upon the Lord, even for what seems like a very long time, for His salvation to come.

Finally, that thorny question of *why doesn’t it seem that Jesus always heals us?* Obviously, we can only approach this question with fear and trembling, and we don’t have time to fully explore it now. But we can say this: in all things, we must entrust our lives to God’s providence, recognizing that we only see in part, and that He is always good. Even more, whenever Jesus heals in the Scriptures, physical healing is never an end in itself: it is meant to increase faith, because faith leads to *eternal* salvation. Faith, humility, and patience may not always lead to healing of our bodily afflictions. But they do move God to heal us of something far more than our momentary pains: they move God to heal the *soul* for eternity.