

13th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

In today's Gospel Jesus returns to the west shore of the Sea of Galilee, a journey from Gentile to Jewish territory. He is on home ground again. On his return a large crowd gathers around him, and out of the press of people one person comes forward, a Jewish official. Jairus has an important position in the local community, supervising services in the synagogue. But he hasn't come to Jesus to talk about details of ritual. In spite of his religious status, Jairus falls at the feet of Jesus and begs him to save the life of his twelve year old daughter, who is seriously ill.

Jairus is a desperate father; his love for his daughter makes him a beggar, craving the help of the one person who can restore her to full health. His dignity is cast aside; his longing is expressed in his whole body language, a body which is now fallen at the feet of Jesus. Such is the quality of his desperation. Jesus says nothing, promises nothing. His action speaks for itself – he simply goes with Jairus. And the crowd press forward, no doubt wanting to witness at first hand the new drama.

The walk to Jairus' house is interrupted by a secret sufferer. Out of the press of people a woman comes up behind Jesus. She suffers from an incurable haemorrhage, an affliction that makes her, and anyone she touches, ritually unclean. She has already exhausted all attempts at a natural cure, and the long and painful treatments have exhausted her savings. She is all spent. All she has left in life is a saving dream that Jesus can cure her. She jostles her way through the crowd that is heading somewhere else, hoping that if she can touch Jesus' clothes, that contact will be enough. Such is the quality of her desperation. Such is the quality of her faith in the power of Jesus.

When the woman touches Jesus' clothes, she senses that she is cured of her complaint; but she is not allowed to disappear back into the crowd. Jesus insists on asking who touched his clothes. Clearly Jesus doesn't want to be treated like a mobile relic, a magical touchstone that requires no relationship. He continues to look around the crowd. His question and his look bring the woman forward. She is frightened, falls at the feet of Jesus and tells him the whole truth. It is only when she meets the person of Jesus that the action is approved and her cure confirmed. The purpose of the personal meeting is not to humiliate the woman but to commend her for her faith and let her go her way in peace.

The bleeding of twelve long years has now stopped, but that good news is interrupted by messengers from Jairus' house with the news that the life

of twelve short years has come to an end. The beloved daughter of Jairus is dead. This time, Jesus does speak to Jairus: “Do not be afraid; only have faith.” Taking with him only his inner circle of disciples, Jesus goes to the house and is greeted by the wails of the mourners. When he expresses his belief that the girl is not dead but asleep, the mourning becomes mockery. The scoffers are thrown out; only the girl’s parents and the three disciples accompany Jesus into the girl’s room. At the command of Jesus the girl rises from the bed of death, and Jesus tells the astonished witnesses that a snack for the little girl would do no harm. For Jairus, after all, there **was no need** to be afraid.

It is worth dwelling on the detail of the stories because they give us an insight into the mystery of Jesus. They tell us about a man who has a fierce kinship with those who suffer, who does not disappoint those who look to him for help. Like Jairus, there are many people who suffer on behalf of their loved ones and feel powerless when they are confronted by the pain of those they love. How often do we hear the complaint “No parent should have to bury their child.” But the truth and the reality is that, unlike Jairus, there are many parents who have had to attend the funeral of their young children.

On this weekend we celebrate the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of our Australian community. We might remember in a particular way those whose traditional way of life has been denied, those in remote communities who are victims of violence and abuse – especially women and children, We remember and pray for those who grieve the loss of children because basic medical help was simply not available. Whatever the reasons for their disadvantage – and the causes and the reasons are complex – we must do what we can to respect them and bring about change. The high mortality rate among aboriginal children is one aspect that must be addressed. Playing the blame game will not help. Agitating for proper health services, improved education and listening to the needs expressed by the indigenous communities themselves will!!

There are many mothers and fathers of all peoples and all cultures who continue to grieve secretly, remembering their loss long after everyone else has forgotten the source of their pain. Their children are no less precious to Jesus than the daughter of Jairus. To Jesus, these children are asleep in death. As the risen Lord he will come to awaken them. That is our faith. That is why the words addressed to Jairus are addressed to all of us: “Do not be afraid; only have faith.”

The Gospel story of Jairus is given to us as Good News. It is offered to us *today* to nourish our faith in Jesus, to enliven our hope in his power over death itself. We know there are those who mock that belief, professional mourners who believe that death must have the last word in every human story. There is no place for that attitude in the community that gathers in the Lord's name. In this eucharist we support each other in our shared faith, we confront real loss with Jesus at our side. And when the loss is deeply felt, we too need to hear the words of Jesus: "Do not be afraid; only have faith."