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In January 2018, David Brooks of The New York Times wrote a column entitled “Now Is the Time to Talk About the Power of Touch.” In a wonderfully expressive phrase he spoke of the power of “disenchanted emotional touch,” a touch not grounded in love or commitment which, when abusive, has the power to cripple if not destroy the immeasurably positive potential of loving touch. Brooks wrote: “Emotional touch alters the heart and soul in ways that are mostly unconscious. It can take a lifetime of analysis to get even a glimpse of understanding.” There could hardly be a better introduction to today’s Gospel.

So many times when we hear this Gospel, we focus on the woman’s healing and the little girl’s resuscitation, but as Mark tells the story, those are only the backdrop to the real action. In this account, Mark mentions touching seven times. The crowd “pressed” around Jesus. The woman believed that his touch would heal and she touched Jesus. Jesus asked twice who had touched him and finally, after the father had asked him to lay hands on her, Jesus took the little girl by the hand and raised her.

Both the woman and the girl’s father believed in the power of Jesus’ touch and both received its life-giving results. Certainly, many people touched Jesus with little effect — that’s exactly what the disciples were trying to tell him when he asked who had touched him. But like a child who instinctively comprehends the emotional message of a touch, when that woman touched him, Jesus knew that someone had sought and found something desperately needed.

Jesus was never content to distribute miracles as if by magic wand or vending machine. The woman had started something when she touched him, but she had only just begun. She had used her initiative and obtained the result she sought without being aware of how small her expectations in the light of what Jesus had to offer.

The next step was for Jesus to seek her out. This may be the only time in the Gospels that Jesus sought someone he didn’t know, whom he could not call by name. When she approached him face-to-face, like so many who encountered his power, she did so in fear and trembling. Mark says that “she told him the whole truth,” implying that she explained her situation, her hope, her audacious, unlawful decision and the wondrous result it brought. For the moment that was her whole truth: She was suffering, she had hoped for a cure and received it.

Jesus’ reply opened up a new horizon for her. As he had told others, he said that her faith had saved her and she was free to go in peace, cured of her illness. But Jesus said more — something utterly extraordinary. Jesus called her “daughter.”

This is the only time in Mark's Gospel that Jesus called someone "daughter." He had called others his mother, sisters and brothers (3:34), he addressed a paralytic as "child" (2:5) and he once called his followers "disciples" (14:14) but never before or after did he address a person as his daughter or son.

We are left to wonder what it was about her that led Jesus to call her his own in that unique way. It could have been her hope or her faith, perhaps her audacity. Each of those qualities opened her to receive life from him in what he recognized as an unprecedented way. She had started it by touching his garment in a way that touched him profoundly. He returned the gesture not by laying on hands, but by calling her "daughter," indicating that she was receiving life from him as he did from his Father.

We hear no more about her, and are never told her name. She may have been one of the women who continued to follow Jesus, who remained to witness the crucifixion and who, Luke tells us, supported Jesus from their own means. Whatever she did, she knew that she had received life from Jesus and became as closely bound to him as a child to her parents.

We find reflections of this Gospel woman in people like Pakistani Malala Yousafzai, an activist at the age of 11 who was one of two 2014 Nobel Peace laureates when she was 17. She is also well represented by the former slave and U.S. citizen, Sojourner Truth who proclaimed, "I will not allow my life's light to be determined by the darkness around me."

The woman Jesus called his daughter is a representative of all people who reach out for Christ's help, trusting that their plea will touch God and open to how the touch of God can transform them.

WISDOM 1:13-15, 2:23-24

We are accustomed to hearing this reading at funerals as a reminder of God's mercy and life-giving plan for all of creation. When we hear it today, we can broaden our perspective on the message if we put it in the context of the verse that precedes our opening line. Wisdom 1:12 says "Do not court death by your erring way of life, nor draw to yourselves destruction by the works of your hands." That opening sentence indicates that the author was calling his readers to take responsibility for the quality of their own lives. It claims that death and suffering are the results of deviation from God's plan, they were not part of God's original design.

The first few lines of our reading critique every concept of a vengeful God. This teaching reflects the first chapters of Genesis, reminding people that humanity is made in God's image and that every distortion or destruction of that image is the work of the devil.

Wisdom's teaching about eternal life was a radical concept for some people at that time. Combining Greek and Jewish traditions, the author concluded that humans are destined for eternity. Avant-garde at the time they were written, those teachings remain valid today.

If we allow the reading to speak to our moment of history it becomes a complement to Pope Francis' teachings on care of the earth and all her creatures. Wisdom says that God did not make death, Francis teaches that human and social degradation bring about the premature death of the most vulnerable people and the earth's resources ("Laudato Si' on Care for Our Common Home" #20, 29, 48). Wisdom says that God formed the human to be imperishable, Francis teaches that the "ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God" (LS #83). Francis expands Wisdom's teaching that "all things ... are wholesome" by saying that "all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God" (ibid).

When we read this selection from the word of God in the light of today's most pressing questions, it calls us to the same responsibility for our actions as does Francis in *Laudato Si'*. Francis sharpens the focus of Wisdom by reminding us not simply that God is the creator of life, but that "the divine and human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God's creation" (#9), and that "everything in the world is connected" (#16).

In the end, Francis calls human beings to take responsibility for life by cultivating gratitude, a loving awareness that we are connected to all creatures. He calls us to develop our capacities for creativity and enthusiasm for resolving the world's problems (#220). That is how we can praise and thank the God who fashioned all things and who fashioned us after the imperishable, divine nature.

PSALMS 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11, 12, 13

At first glance, we recognize this as a psalm of thanksgiving for deliverance, a straightforward expression of appreciation for God's goodness. It might express gratitude for something specific we have experienced or more generally for life and God's promises. If we would pray the psalm in gratitude for God's invitation and promise, we could also pray it as a way to cash in on God's pledge to remain with us in the struggle to care for and heal our earth and her wounded people.

A prayer of gratitude which recalls moments of salvation is perhaps our best way to prepare for a struggle for justice. As we pray this psalm, we might recall that we prayed it at the Easter Vigil. That makes this psalm not simply an expression of personal gratitude, but a proclamation of faith in the Resurrection and thus in the ultimate victory of God's design for creation.

Once we are convinced of and grateful for the certainty that God's plan will come to fruition, we can sing with confidence no matter the odds we face. We will move forward with conviction because we have realized that it is only by moving forward that we give God the opportunity to draw us clear from whatever might make us feel impotent or fearful. Our particular expectations may not be met, but God's design will continue to advance. Knowing that, we can approach every struggle with faith that we will never be alone. Then we know what it means to sing,

"I will praise you Lord, for you have rescued me."

2 CORINTHIANS 8:7, 9, 13-15

This reading, a little like the Letter to Philemon, brings us into contact with Paul as a highly-skilled cajoler. After telling the Corinthians how generous the impoverished Macedonians were in giving to the suffering Christians of Jerusalem, his goal is to get the Corinthians to open their own purses. If that were all he accomplished with this part of the letter, it would be enough; he would have brought them into a greater practice of charity. But Paul's theology is broader than that, and therefore his request includes a call to greater grace.

The background to today's reading is that Paul had decided to collect and bring money to the Christians suffering in Jerusalem. While their distress was sufficient reason for working on their behalf, Paul had an additional motive: Procuring help from Gentile Christians for the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem would be a self-perpetuating expression of their unity in Christ, a unity that was not without strain in Paul's day. As Mitzi Minor points out in her work *2 Corinthians*, this collection "symbolized the new creation that God is graciously inaugurating in which the cosmos is reconciled to God [and] just relations prevail among all people." Paul wasn't just asking for money, he was asking his people to act like they were one in Christ.

Paul begins by praising Christ's own generosity. Echoing the hymn of Philippians 2, Paul reminds them that Christ became poor for their sake so that by his poverty they could become genuinely rich. Thus his first appeal to them is to be Christ-like, to make good on their baptism. The Corinthians had been known to boast of their knowledge, now Paul gives them the chance to prove — first to themselves and then to the world — that they truly know Christ. The only way to do that is through imitation of him.

When Paul tells the Corinthians that their giving is a matter of equality, he's not speaking as a civil rights lawyer, but a theologian. The word from our era that would bring his challenge home is solidarity, a word used 68 times in the document from the Fifth Conference of Latin American Bishops held in Aparecida, Brazil in 2007. In the Aparecida document, the bishops teach that solidarity is the Christian imperative that springs from our faith in Christ and that counteracts the culture of death. Solidarity, as described in the concluding document from the conference, is "a permanent attitude of encounter, brotherly and sisterly spirit, and service" which must take on visible characteristics, particularly in "defense of life and of the rights of the most vulnerable and excluded" (#394).

Paul was calling the Corinthians not simply to generosity, but to authenticity in their faith through what the Latin American bishops call solidarity. He taught that allowing others to suffer while they had the means to make a difference contradicted Christian identity. The bishops of Latin America are saying the same to today's Church. At the end of today's passage, Paul cites the experience of the Exodus when God sent enough manna for every day: The evidence of God's plan for the world was that there would always be enough for everyone. God's providence was such that hoarding accomplished nothing more than demonstrating a lack of faith. The same is true today.

MARK 5:21-43

Mark builds today's Gospel like a miracle archway: The two columns are the father's request and healing of the daughter of a synagogue official. The pinnacle is the healing of the woman with a hemorrhage. If the story were an arched gate, the entire construction would be adorned with symbols of hands and touching, an idea that recurs seven times from the official's original request that Jesus lay hands on his daughter to the moment when Jesus touches her and she rises.

In between the father's request and the girl's arising, Mark describes both meaningless and healing touch. Meaningless touch is what happens when a group becomes a crowd and tries to move. Their attention is focused on their goal and who bumps into whom is of no account. That's how the disciples saw this walk with Jesus; they were on the way to the official's house and their intention was to remain near and see what would happen. Jostling was as inconsequential as the breeze as long as they could maintain a good viewing position. But the crux of the story focused on the woman they didn't even notice, the one who had suffered for 12 years — symbolically forever. Mark tells us that physicians had been ineffective to accomplish anything except to have her spend all she had in vain.

Mark subtly leads us through the steps of her journey of faith. First, she heard about Jesus. What she heard sparked her hope and kindled her faith. Like someone who approaches God based on God's merciful reputation rather than personal knowledge, she snuck up behind Jesus, believing that simply touching his cloak would save her.

She was right. Just coming in contact with him healed her infirmity. But for Jesus that was not enough. Jesus was not teaching theology or representing a far-off but benevolent miracle-working deity; Jesus was bringing people into God's kingdom, the real presence of his loving Father for whom all things were possible. With a tactile sensitivity that most adults have grown out of, Jesus perceived that someone in the crowd had touched him as who he was, not just as another body in the crowd. So, he turned to look the one who had recognized him for who he was.

Mark does not say that Jesus made his question public, but rather that the woman, comprehending what had happened to her and seeing Jesus looking around, presented herself before him, in effect, allowing him to enter into personal relationship with her. He reciprocated by calling her "daughter," assuring her that her faith had saved her and that she could go in peace, healed of her affliction.

This Sunday's readings work together to remind us that God created the universe for immense good and that we have the power to collaborate with the divine plan or to allow the demons of greed and unbelief to shrink the atmosphere to the dimensions of our worst fears. The bold woman Jesus called "daughter," reminds us that if we will risk reaching out in hope, the results can be beyond our imagining.

Planning: 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

By: Lawrence Mick

Today's readings remind us of the link between care for the Earth and care for the poor. That idea is reiterated in the encyclical "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home" where Pope Francis emphasizes that the poor and the marginalized are who suffer most from climate change and environmental destruction. They have the fewest resources to adapt to climate changes and often live in areas that are the most vulnerable to rising seas levels and other environmental effects.

But the link goes even deeper than these observable effects. The foundations of this dual concern lie in God's love for every part of creation and God's special care for the least among us.

The first reading reminds us that God "fashioned all things that they might have being; and the creatures of the world are wholesome." God does not "rejoice in the destruction of the living." Wisdom attributes death and destruction to the power of the devil. In the Gospel, we see Jesus expressing God's care for the needy by healing the woman with a long-standing illness and raising the synagogue official's daughter from death.

Our God is in favor of life. Paul reminds us of the concerns of justice by calling us to mutual love and care: “As a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their needs, so that their abundance may also supply your needs that there may be equality.” We are called to share the goods of the Earth so that all have their basic needs met.

The emphasis in these readings on life and healing might make this a good day to celebrate the anointing of the sick in the midst of the community. This takes considerable preparation, but it offers the whole community’s support to those suffering from significant illnesses. Mass schedules and the potential number of people from the parish who may partake may determine whether it is best to include the anointing within a normal Sunday Mass or to have a separate Mass later in the day for anointing. Another advantage to celebrating the sacrament at a regularly scheduled Mass time is to help the whole assembly recognize the proper role of this sacrament — care for the sick, not something reserved for the moment of death.

Even if you don’t celebrate the anointing today, this could still be a time to focus on the sacrament, with catechesis in the homily and/or in the bulletin to help people learn when to ask for the anointing and to recognize Viaticum (Communion for the dying) as the proper sacrament when death approaches.

July 4: Independence Day in the U. S. falls on Wednesday this week — right between two weekends. Parish leaders might consider a special Mass or prayer service on the holiday itself this year.

Prayers: 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

By: Peg Ekerdt

Introduction

Today’s readings invite us to join Jesus in living his profound love for all creation — caring for the Earth, accompanying the sick, reaching out to the broken with a generosity that matches his own. On this first week of July, when summer invites us to relax and renew, we ask for the grace to let the word permeate and guide us, refreshing and energizing our intentions to practice the generous justice of the Lord.

Penitential Act

- Lord Jesus, you recognize the broken in your midst: Lord, have mercy.
- Christ Jesus, ridicule did not stop you from healing people in need: Christ, have mercy.
- Lord Jesus, you call us to imitate the work of the kingdom: Lord, have mercy.

Prayer of the Faithful

Presider Let us pray for the needs of this gathered community and for our world.

Minister For the church, for willingness to be the healing presence of Jesus in our world — serving the poor, practicing justice, healing all who are in need ... we pray,

- For leaders and citizens of our nation; for all places where violence destroys the fabric of human dignity — for leaders who are bound to create legacies of peace ... we pray,
- For children who suffer illness of any kind and for parents who love them; for trust in Jesus’ words, “Do not be afraid” ... we pray,
- For those who work in health care professions; for all who set policy that establishes affordable health care, for those who daily face addiction or depression, for all the sick and suffering ... we pray,
- For grace to open our hearts and allow our abundance to supply the needs of others; for courage to live what we profess: that we all are equal before God ... we pray,

- As we celebrate the fourth of July, with hope that the pursuit of liberty and justice for all will continue to form us as a people ... we pray,

Presider Loving God, you sent your Son to live among us to show us how to live. Give us the desire to hear those who cry out and the courage to imitate his healing compassion and radical concern for others. Open our minds and form our hearts so we may do your will each day. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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