

**Not Unto Death**  
**13<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)**  
**(Mk 5:21-43)**

St. Mark is the most concise of the four Gospels, yet in the two healing miracles of chapter five (the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac and the healing of the woman and girl), he is longer and more detailed than all the others. These miracles are extremely significant. The healing of the woman and girl is unique in that one miracle takes place within the context of another; the two are connected. Whether or not the two ever knew or had contact with each other before this day the Gospel does not say, yet the woman bled from her womb from the time the girl was born from the womb, and the woman was healed in her womb at the time when the girl arrives at the age of adolescence, twelve.

By means of this double miracle Jesus shows himself to be the healer of womanhood, and the injuries which pertain to the feminine psyche and vocation. Nevertheless, there are also many other lessons that are generally applicable, of which I will highlight three.

First is the mysterious truth that all our lives are related and interconnected, something that can only be seen from the perspective of heaven. These two individuals, the woman the girl, likely did not know each other before their healings (though it is likely that after the resurrection they met as they became evangelizers in the early Church). Yet their lives, and the particular sufferings they were experiencing due to their illnesses, united them in a supernatural way to each other and God's plan of salvation. The same truth is beautifully highlighted in the Old Testament book of Tobit. Though we may not realize how it occurs, God sees how one person's sufferings benefit another, and how disparate individuals even around the world, may be deeply united with each other.

Catholics learn from this Gospel, that as disciples of Christ our sufferings and particularly our illnesses, serve an important spiritual purpose and must be offered to the Lord in union with the Cross. We will not recognize their full significance in this life unless God gives a particular revelation, but we know and trust that in some way they atone for sin, and bring grace to others.

Second, Jesus tells his suffering disciples to have courage born of faith (Mk 5:36). As the divine healer, Jesus comes to mankind with a gift and power higher than anything human doctors can provide. The woman experienced what so many people today experience in dealing with the healthcare industry: despite many advances and accomplishments of modern medicine, many illnesses still do not have a cure, or sometimes even a diagnosis. Doctors and hospitals are extremely expensive, and the industry is run by big companies intent on making profit,

instead of dedicated healers called to serve their fellow man. This was witnessed during the lockdown, when even priests were prohibited from visiting sick and dying patients. Even the “Catholic” hospitals no longer have much spiritual understanding of illness and healing.

*“She had suffered greatly at the hands of many doctors and had spent all that she had. Yet she was not helped but only grew worse”* (Mk 5:26). In any illness, we must go to Jesus for healing first and last, in addition to seeking the usual human remedies offered by doctors. In any serious illness, we must always seek the grace of God, understanding that the spiritual battle is more important than the physical battle. When it is an illness or condition that touches upon our mortality (i.e., danger of death), we must seek the Lord above all in the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Like the woman, or the girl’s family, we trust the power of the Lord, and the laying of His healing hands upon our condition.

Jesus knows something we do not, and he tells us to have courage, not to be afraid. He is untouchable by the power of illness, and the power of death. He is eternal Life and Resurrection, and all he touches becomes imbued with this Life. Thus it is that he approaches illness’ culmination which is death, and steps into the home of the mourners, devastated and distressed, with a shocking pronouncement.

A third most important lesson from this Gospel is the way Jesus teaches his followers to approach death: *“The child is not dead but asleep!”* (Mk 5:39). Jesus never liked to use the word “death.” There is no death with him. “Death” is final, it means the end, it means “nothing more.” But there is more. Jesus knows what we do not: death is not the end, there is much more. “Death” is merely “sleep;” we will awaken. Jesus also used this term when referring to Lazarus: *“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him”* (Jn 11:11). Likewise the writings of St. Paul. It is this profound theological understanding of death which directs Christians away from the practice of cremation and “scattering the ashes to the wind.” That is a false understanding of death. Christians bury the body asleep in a bed (coffin), head resting on a pillow, dressed in best clothes, ready to wake.

Jesus enters the house, takes the young girl by the hand, and pulls her back into life with the words, *“Talitha koum”* (“Wake up little one!”). Mark takes pains to record the actual Aramaic words spoken by Jesus on this occasion, which means those words are universally significant for every Christian. When we rise from the grave on the final day, those are the exact words we will hear, and when we open our eyes again, it is Christ’s face we will see.

As we deal with serious illness in our lives and within our families, let us remember this Gospel, whose teachings are also summarized when Jesus heals Lazarus: *“This illness is not unto death, it is for the glory of God”* (Jn 11:4).