

June 28, 2015 Just Have Faith Homily

Every so often I am asked to participate in the parish Healing service. Brother Peter Furlong, a De Lasalle Christian brother and dear friend of the Sacred Heart faith community, leads the service and is ably assisted by members of his "prayer team", which meets regularly Monday night in the rectory basement. Given the history of my health woes, I am always enthusiastic about my role in the service. It is an emotional experience.

As the service draws to a close, the members of the congregation are asked to come forward to pray with one of the four prayer teams. Surprisingly, many come forward who enjoy the best of health. It is not unusual to see them weeping. They ask prayers for those who are close to them. "Please remember my son who is dying of cancer", "My daughter is a drug addict. Pray to God that I remain strong in my faith", "My husband is disabled and is deeply depressed".

In our gospel reading today we meet a distinguished official of the Synagogue, Jairus. He is a respected member of the Jewish community. Among his many duties are: sounding the ram's horn to summon the people to worship, presenting the sacred scrolls of the Torah (God's Word) for the readers and choosing the men who will have some role in the liturgical service. Jairus is a desperate and fearful man. His daughter is gravely ill and close to death. Moved by the Spirit, he throws caution to the wind. He approaches Jesus.

Recall that in the previous chapter of Mark's Gospel, Jesus was expelled from another synagogue (Mk.3:6). We learned of a plan to kill him. Jairus's only concern is that Jesus heal his daughter before it is too late. In the presence of Our Lord, he falls to his knees, which is the posture of a beggar or slave (Mk.5:22) He was unafraid of losing his exalted position as a synagogue official simply because his love for his daughter and his unwavering trust in the healing power of Christ. Desperate moments often call for extreme acts, which often come as a personal risk. Faith can exist in the face of seemingly hopeless situations.

The filmmaker Woody Allen is a favorite of mine, an agnostic Jew, he often pokes fun at religion. I really can't help it. He is so funny! In one memorable scene in his Academy award winning film, Annie Hall, Woody plays the role of Alvie Singer, an insecure and neurotic character. In this scene Annie Hall, Alvie's girlfriend says "Oh, so you see an analyst". "Yeah, just for fifteen years". "Fifteen years" replied the exasperated Annie. "Yeah, I am going to give him one more year and than I am going to Lourdes", replied Alvie.

Even in this comical scene a profound truth is uttered. The lengths people will go to stave off death. Even Alvie is willing to take that risk!

Several years ago, the younger brother of my father's closest friend was dying of cancer. He was only fifty years old. His doctors could do no more for him. The shadow of death was lengthening and death was near. Some suggested he go to the famous Marian shrine

in Lourdes, France. He agreed to make the trip. Upon his return home, his friend found that his condition had worsened. "Are you disappointed that you were not healed, that there was no miracle?" "Oh, but there as a miracle, he replied. I am at peace. Now I realize that death is not the ultimate end of human life; it does not have the final word! It is only a temporary place from which I will be awakened. Lourdes prepared me for death and my passageway to another, better place."

Dear brothers and sisters, in the course of our life it is surely not uncommon to have desperate moments in which we are overcome by fear and dread. Sometimes, we panic and may act irrationally. That's how powerful is our concern for our loved one's welfare. But let us be consoled and strengthened by Jesus's words in our gospel reading today. "Do not be afraid. Just have faith" (Mk.5:36) "Arise, little girl". (Mk.5:41) The raising of the child who lost her life is a sign that despair and terror at the prospect of death are no longer an inescapable part of human life.

The Jesus who emerges from this story is one who is compassionate in the face of grief and suffering and who boldly declares his Word... that all who trust in Him will arise, even for those whose hearts have been broken by the trials and tribulations faced by a loved one!

Amen!