

Death, where is thy sting?

13th Sunday – Cycle B – June 13, 2021

Readings: Wis 1:13-15; 2:23-24; 2 Cor 8:7,9,13-15; Mk 5:21-43

“Jesus said to her, ‘Talitha cum’, which means, ‘Little girl, get up!’ (Mk 5:41)

Prologue: We often regard death as the greatest human disaster. We dread dying; yet, cannot escape it. On the one hand, the Bible portrays death as a hungry (Isa 5:14; Hab 2:5), fearful (Heb 2:15) “last enemy” (1 Cor 15:28) that traps victims (Ps 18:4-5), destroys children (Jer 9:21) and has entered our world through human sin (Rom 5:12-21); and, on the other, God has total authority over death since Jesus decisively conquers death by rising from the dead. As a guarantee that we too will rise from the dead, Jesus heals a hemorrhaging woman and raises Jairus’s daughter.

Three Scriptural Signposts:

1. The Book of Wisdom was written by a Greek-speaking Jew living in Alexandria in Egypt in the middle of the 1st century BC. He quotes the OT from the Septuagint (i.e., the Greek translation of the Bible) and is familiar not only with the Greek language but also with Greek philosophy and culture. Thus, amidst a supposedly superior Greek human, intellectual tradition, he stresses the point that God is the creator of everything, and all things wise, good and beautiful are created by God alone. The opening words of today’s reading declare: “God did not make death, and God does not delight in the death of the living” (v. 13). Thus life, not death, is the ultimate destiny of humankind planned for us by God. To substantiate his point, the author says, “God created all things so that they might exist; the generative forces of the world are wholesome” (v.14). Moreover, “righteousness is immortal” (v.15), and, “God made us in the image of his own eternity” (v.23), which is parallel to Gen 1:26-27. However, “through the devil’s envy death entered the world” (v.24a). This probably refers to the Fall of our first parents (Gen 3). Here, the author does not refer to a physical, biological death but to a moral degeneration and spiritual death, which “those who belong to his [devil’s] company experience” (v.24b). Since God has endowed us with freedom, we are free to opt for God, the good and godly company or to choose evil in Satan’s company.
2. Today’s gospel passage gives concrete evidence of Jesus, God’s Son, conquering sickness and death as a foretaste of what is to come. Mark sandwiches the story of the woman with the hemorrhage in-between two parts of the narrative of the raising of Jairus’s dead daughter to life. This insertion can be understood either as: (a) a device to explain Jesus’ late arrival at Jairus’s house—a delay that meant that the little girl had already died; or (b) that the miracle in the insertion explains the other, greater miracle, of Jesus’ victory not only over illnesses but even over death. The miracle of the woman suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years (vv.25-34) has poignant details. First, the fact that “she had spent all that she had” (v.26) on doctors and medicines indicates that she was poor. Second, she was greatly influenced by the thinking of that time that there were certain things and persons considered religiously holy or unholy, ritually pure or impure, socially touchable or untouchable. Thus, though it is unclear how and from whom “she had heard about Jesus” (v.27), yet she considered him a *theios aner* – a ‘divine man’ – and believed that even touching his cloak was enough to heal her. Third, she also knew her position in society as a sick, bleeding, weak woman who could not make any claims on Jesus except make bold to touch his cloak. Fourth, so deep was her faith that Jesus felt her touch (amidst the surging crowd), stemming from deep faith, a

determined will and her pure heart, and asked, “Who touched my clothes?” (v.31). Finally, when she confesses with “fear and trembling” Jesus tells her, “Daughter, *your faith* has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease” (v.34). Jesus praises her faith before the crowd and a poor woman, healed, experiences new life.

3. If the woman’s illness causes awe and wonder, the raising of Jairus’s daughter is even more astounding. This miracle has precedents in the prophetic tradition where dead children are restored to life by Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:32-37). However, Jesus is revealed as the Prophet par excellence. Here, too, the element of touch is present. While members of the Sanhedrin were suspicious of Jesus and schemed against him, Jairus, “one of the leaders of the synagogue” (v.22) begged Jesus: “Come and *lay your hands* on her, so that she may be made well, and live” (v.23). Jairus has deep faith in the healing power of Jesus unlike the weeping and wailing crowds who even laugh at him (v.40) when he says, “The child is not dead but sleeping” (v.39). Jesus puts the weeping, faithless crowd outside and takes only his three disciples and the girl’s father and mother—a close circle of faith, hope and love—into the room where the dead girl lay. No prayers are said, no elaborate gestures of healing are made. Jesus simply “took her by the hand and said to her, ‘*Talitha cum,*’ which means, ‘Little girl, get up!’” (v.41). Jesus’ tender, loving and healing touch turns death to life and the unbelief of the crowd to belief. Humble and human as he is, Jesus “strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat” (v.43).

Linking the Responsorial Psalm and Second Reading to the Theme:

- The psalm (30) links the 1st reading and gospel: “Lord, you have raised my soul from the dead and restored me to life.” The original context is the ‘death’ that the Israelites experienced in the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes and the ensuing restoration of the temple in the time of the Maccabees (164 BC). It is thus a psalm of national thanksgiving. However, here it celebrates Christ’s victory over death.
- The second reading must be read in the context of the economic equality that Paul desires between the poorer Jewish converts in Palestine and the richer Corinthians, whom Paul implores “to excel also in this generous undertaking” (v.7): of helping their poorer brethren. He cites the example of Jesus who, “though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (v.9). Poverty can lead to a slow death of people; hence, the need of everyone to lend a helping hand and reach out to the poor, showing them love and giving them new life.

Covid Concern amidst Unprecedented Death Toll: As of June 21, 2021, the official figure of deaths in India due to Covid-19 is about 39 lakhs. However, the actual rate is believed to be closer to 65 lakhs. Be that as it may, as wounded healers in a broken world, can we hold people’s hands with love, and full of the Spirit cry out with Christ, “*Talitha, kum!*” – little girl, sick man, addicted youth, sorrowing widow, depressed priest, failed student, “arise, get up!”? Death comes in many forms: biological, moral, spiritual, social, economic, etc. Let’s cooperate with Christ to fight death and promote Life.

In Lighter Vein: Said the doctor to the patient on his deathbed, “Friend, there is no hope; you will surely die soon. Is there anything you would like me to do for you before you die?” The patient whispered feebly, “Yes, doctor! Can you take me to another doctor?” Above all doctors, stands the Mighty Healer crying out, “Get up! Arise!” Yes, death, where is thy sting?
