

The national debate on health care will undoubtedly be difficult and politicized, but everyone agrees we need to do something with the health care system in our country. Just last month, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement to the United States Senate Committee on Finance for its discussion on expanding health care coverage. The bishops said, “[we] have been and continue to be consistent advocates for comprehensive health care reform leading to accessible and affordable health care for all. In a nation with the resources we have, health care should be such that all our citizens receive the kind of health care that provides for the needs of all in a coherent and consistent way.” Our bishops also said, “[We] oppose inclusion of . . . procedures or technologies that attack or undermine the sanctity and dignity of life. No health care reform plan should compel us or others to pay for or participate in the destruction of human life.” And, “All people need and should have access to comprehensive, quality health care that they can afford, and this should not depend on their stage of life, where or whether they or their parents work, how much they earn, or where they live or where they come from.” You can find the complete statement online.

The woman in today’s gospel would heartily agree. She was afflicted with menstrual bleeding for 12 years. She tried to get better. But, Mark says, “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.” She was physically sick, ritually unclean, and now below the poverty line. Of course, she had access to the best health care plan of all: She touched the cloak of Jesus.

Hers is one of several miracle stories in this section of Mark’s gospel: Jesus calms a stormy sea. He drives out a demon from a possessed man. He cures this woman of her affliction, and the crowning miracle of this series, he raises the daughter of Jairus from the dead. One by one these miracles increasingly reveal the power of Jesus over the elements, over spirits, over ill health, and even over death. Today’s two stories are tightly wound. Both involve women threatened by an early death. One of them is 12 years old, and the other has suffered for 12 years. One dies before she can bear children, and the other has an affliction that prevents her from childbearing. After Jesus sees the 12-year old, he commands her to arise, using the same word that will be used for his own resurrection. Then she walks around, and Jesus commands the crowd to give her something to eat, just as he walked around after his resurrection and ate with his disciples. Her new life signifies the new life Jesus promises us when we rise again to eat with him at the banquet table of heaven.

In the health care debate, the Catholic Church will continue to defend the rights of the unborn, the poor, and of the everyday American who wants good quality, affordable health care. With our voice, we can each be the body of Christ. We can be the cloak that the sick will reach out to touch when they ask for healing. When we make the right choices, selfless choices, our country will be a healthier place to live, and our souls will find salvation.