

## 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

One of our cathedral musicians, Justin Hurst, told me this week that he is pursuing medical school. Dr. Mario said, “He wants to be a heart surgeon.” I said to Justin, “I hope I never need you.” He said, “The other field I’m considering is pediatrics, and you won’t need me for that either.” God has blessed me with good health. I know that will ultimately change, but I’m one of those delusional men who think that nothing will ever go wrong and deny it when it does. Some people make repeated visits to doctors, even for things I wouldn’t find bothersome. But others rely regularly on the skills of medical staffs, whose expertise is on the whole phenomenal. In earning our respect they have fostered our unreasonable expectations that they can cure anything. It disillusiones a patient when they can’t.

The woman whose story interrupts today’s gospel is one of those patients. Mark’s description of her sounds alarmingly contemporary: “There was a woman afflicted with hemorrhages for twelve years. 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.” Few people in Jesus’ day could afford doctors; she had to be wealthy. The Book of Leviticus (15) said a woman who bled was unclean, and impurity was contagious. Anything she touched became unclean. Anyone who touched her became unclean. This applied even to menstruation: A woman who bled was forbidden to touch anything sacred. The woman in today’s gospel was physically sick, ritually unclean, marginalized, and moneyless. To us it looks reckless for her to touch Jesus’ cloak. To Jesus, it looked faithful. Lest anyone think that merely touching cloth would heal like magic, Jesus clarifies that her faith saved her. Faith restored not only her health, but her dignity in society.

The story of the daughter of Jairus brackets this account. The synagogue official asks Jesus to cure his daughter lest she die. Jesus sets off with him, and after Jesus heals the woman, hope soars above the horrible revelation that the girl has just died. Jairus had asked Jesus to lay hands on his daughter. The Book of Numbers declared a person unclean if they touched a dead body (19:11). Jesus said the girl was not dead, grasped her by the hand, and raised her up. One miracle happened within a large crowd; the other in the privacy of a home. The woman touched Jesus’ cloak; he touched the girl’s hand. The woman felt herself healed; Jesus felt power leave him. The official received back his daughter, and Jesus called the woman “Daughter”. The woman and the dead girl risked making Jesus unclean, but he made them clean. The girl was twelve years old; she was born the year the woman started hemorrhaging. Bleeding kept the woman from bearing children; the girl died at the edge of puberty. In these two miracles, Jesus restores health and life to two women who for twelve years had been unable to conceive. Now they both could pass on the gift that he had given them.

All this happened because of faith. Faith does not always bring physical healing, but it can restore dignity, create human wholeness, bring order to life, and bestow purpose on our souls. Some people deny there’s anything wrong with their spiritual health, as many of us men deny there’s anything wrong with our physical health. All of us need to take care of our healths for the sake of ourselves, for the people who rely on us, and for God who gave us life. Healing begins with faith, and it bestows opportunities to give others life.

Sunday, June 27, 2021