

***FIRST IMPRESSIONS*** 13<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY (B)

Wisdom 1: 13-15; 2: 23-24 Psalm 30 2 Cor. 8: 7, 9, 13-15 Mark 5: 21-43

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

Those listening to the second Reading today are going to be puzzled: what's Paul talking about? The text doesn't follow immediately from last week's selection from II Corinthians. In fact, it jumps three chapters! So, even if we don't preach from it, I would choose to say a few – but just a few – words of introduction to help people hear it.

Paul is making a pitch to the Corinthians, who are an economically comfortable community, to help other, less fortunate, Christians. But he isn't a secular fund raiser making a skilled pep talk; instead, he is basing his appeal on faith grounds. The Corinthians had received abundant gifts through their faith in Christ; they were known for their charismatic gifts – tongues, healings, knowledge, wisdom, etc.

Now Paul wants them to turn their boundless energies toward the needs of their sisters and brothers. He bases his appeal on Jesus' self-offering, "the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ." "He was rich," Paul argues, but became poor, renouncing his divine prerogatives for our sake. We have become rich in what lasts, the divine gift of grace. So, Paul encourages the Corinthians to follow Jesus' example and share from their abundance.

The church doesn't consist of independent communities that practice their faith only among their own, in a kind of monastic enclosure. Instead, the blood of Christ unites us all and we can't ignore the needs of our brothers and sisters – in this case, other Christian communities in need. That's the reason a suburban parish adopts one in rural El Salvador and, not only takes up collections for the parish, but sends volunteers there each Spring to repair the church building, repair flood-damaged homes and dig a well for the whole town's use.

Paul says giving isn't a one-way street: the poor have an abundance to share with us. Which is what a group of college students discovered after ten days in a Honduran village at Easter. It was clear from their enthusiastic report to their campus parish the Sunday after they returned. They told how much they received and learned from the community they were sent to serve – about hospitality, family

values, hard work, self-sacrifice and faith in God.

This might be a good Sunday for similar reports to the parish by members of the Social Outreach Committee; students who worked on a Habitat house; the sandwich program, etc. “...your abundance at the present time should supply their needs, so that their abundance may also supply your needs, that there may be equality.”

Things couldn't be worse for the woman with the hemorrhage in today's gospel. Mark spells out her miserable circumstances: she has had her condition for twelve years and has “suffered greatly at the hands of many doctors.” To afford such treatment she must have been a woman of means, but her persistent infirmity is compounded by the fact that she “spent all that she had.” Her issue of blood makes her ritually unclean, excluding her from community worship and contact with other people. She is suffering physically, is financially drained and cut off from religious practices and community. It couldn't get any lower than that. Plus, in her condition, if she touches anyone, that person also becomes unclean. She is a religious outcast and, by touching Jesus, he had become one too! Now the two are in community with one another – two religious and social rejects.

The story of the woman stands out from others in Mark's gospel. Usually, a miracle story focuses more on Jesus. But this one turns attention to the woman right from its opening, “There was a woman....” Mark then describes her condition in unusual detail. We are reminded of another woman in this gospel, the Syrophenician woman (7: 24-30). Unlike his usual rapid-fire, terse narratives, Mark develops the personalities of these two women and their exchanges with Jesus. Both women are in great need and articulate their situations. In today's story the woman told Jesus, “the whole truth.”

The biblical world was dominated by men. When getting married, women left their own families, entered their husband's and were under his domination. Men had absolute power in the family, over his wife and their children. Still, women are frequently mentioned as among the followers of Jesus and the epistles reveal the prominence of some women in the early church – Priscus (Rom 16:3), the deaconess Phoebe (Rom 16:1) and Mary.

The woman in today's story must have been inspiring to women in the early church. She breaks the mold of repressed women of the time. She takes the

initiative and risks being ostracized further as she manages to work her way through the bustling crowd to touch Jesus. She is a woman in a hopeless situation who, nevertheless, has hope in Jesus. She not only overcomes the physical impediments to get to him; she overcomes the religious ones as well. She trusts Jesus is for her, despite what others of her faith might say.

She is an example not only to women who struggle to break through the “glass ceiling” in the world of business and social standing, but also an encouragement to those women in religious settings who feel drained because their ministerial gifts are ignored, underappreciated or even rejected. Still, they push on and struggle to minister and serve, educating children, administering parishes, reaching out to families in need, training lectors and eucharistic ministers, counseling, etc.

After the woman’s healing Jesus addresses her as “Daughter” – she is restored to the family of God’s people, no longer an outcast socially or religiously. Jesus says her faith has saved her. What does that mean in this passage? She was rejected as an outsider, but now God has seen her need for help and healed her. Jesus’ word brings outsiders in and makes them whole. What brings us to Mass today? Are we here reaching out to touch and be touched by Christ? If that happens, how will it change our lives? How will our ties with this community be strengthened? And then will we notice those in the community who are also reaching out physically or emotionally to touch and be touched?

The story of Jairus’ request for his dying daughter was interrupted by the woman with the hemorrhage. Actually, both stories are about “women” in need. Since Jairus’ daughter is twelve, she is considered a woman of marriageable age. Just when her future is about to open up to a new life and wider family ties, she dies. With her death the dreams of both parents die as well.

When Jesus enters the room and touches the dead child he, once again, has crossed over to the “other side” – this time, not by a boat across the lake, but by being on the side with the unclean and outcast. His compassion moves him to take on the taboos of religion and society to help those in impossible situations. Once he raises the girl, Jesus orders that she be given something to eat. The child and the rest of the family are once again whole. Death has been conquered and the community restored. Which is what happens each time we come to Eucharist. The grip of death caused by sin is broken, because Jesus reaches out a hand to raise us up and says to us, “My child, I say to you too, arise.”

## FAITH BOOK

*Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. "Faith Book" is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.*

### **From today's Gospel reading:**

The woman had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak. She said, "If I but touch his clothes, I shall be cured. Immediately her blood dried up...."

Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you."

### **Reflection:**

The woman's illness made her a religious and social outcast. She was unclean, not to touch or be touched by anyone. But she takes a chance, reaches out and touches Jesus. He does not recoil from her but heals her. After her healing Jesus addresses her as "Daughter" – she is no longer an outcast but is restored to the family of God's people. Jesus has come to heal and invite the outsiders into the community.

### **So, we ask ourselves:**

- What is there in my life that makes me feel like an outsider to the church community?
- How can I reach out to Jesus for help?

## JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD

***"God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living..."***  
(Wisdom 1:13)

***"In a nuclear war there would be no victors, only victims."***  
(Pope Benedict XVI January 2006)

Speaking at the U.N. May 5, Archbishop Celestino Migliore, papal nuncio to the world body, reaffirmed the Vatican's support for the nuclear nonproliferation treaty in offering five "concrete, transparent and convincing" steps that could be achieved in "a short period of time" to demonstrate the world's willingness to end the threat that Nuclear weapons pose.

### **Those steps are:**

§ Adherence to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which outlaws nuclear weapon testing.

§ Immediate opening of negotiations on a fissile material Cutoff treaty that would prohibit the further production of weapons grade uranium and plutonium.

§ An end to reliance on nuclear weapons as a part of military policy among nuclear states.

§ Giving oversight of the peaceful use of nuclear energy to the International Atomic Energy Agency and expanding the agency's role to include the nonproliferation side of the treaty.

§ Developing an agreement on the production of nuclear fuel to meet growing energy needs, with fair access for all countries.

The US Catholic Bishops recently sent a letter to Secretary of State Clinton. The letter begins with the words:

***“On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I welcome the Administration’s recent commitments to seek reductions in the number of nuclear weapons and to advance nuclear non-proliferation with an ultimate goal of seeking a nuclear-free world.”*** <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/2009-04-08-hubbard-nonproliferation-letter-hclinton.pdf>

#### **Did you know?**

§ 26,000 nuclear warheads remain in the world's weapons stockpiles.

§ H. Res. 278 has been introduced in the US Senate. It has two goals: Reducing the number of access to nuclear weapons and preventing their proliferation and directing a portion of the resulting \$13 billion saved annually towards child survival, food security, and universal education.

#### **What can I do?**

§ Visit the Action Center (<http://actioncenter.crs.org>) and urge your members of Congress to co-sponsor the “Global Security Priorities” Resolution, H. Res. 278.

**<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/2009-05-22-alert-ccgp-global-security.pdf>**

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, N. C.)

### **POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES**

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I post in this space several inmates’ names and addresses. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know we have not forgotten them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina’s, *“People of Faith Against the Death Penalty.”* If the inmate responds you might consider becoming pen pals.

Please write to:

- Shawn D. Bonnett      #0037215    (On death row since 9/27/96)
- James F. Davis        #0510234    (10/2/96)
- Melvin L White        #0434355    (10/15/96)

---Central Prison    1300 Western Blvd.    Raleigh, N.C.    27606

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,

Jude Siciliano, OP

[FrJude@JudeOP.org](mailto:FrJude@JudeOP.org)