

## Homily: 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B) 2021

Today we hear of two miracles in the one Gospel: the cure of a woman with a haemorrhage sandwiched in St Mark's account of the raising to life of a young girl. In some ways, these are very different miracles: the young girl is cured at the request of her father, Jairus, a synagogue official, a man of status, whilst the woman comes to be healed without even making a request of Jesus – she simply reaches out to touch His cloak. While Jairus has a central place in the community, this woman is considered ritually unclean on account of her illness. She comes in secret, and when discovered she comes forward in fear and trembling, whereas Jairus makes a confident approach to Jesus in front of all. But there are also some significant connections between these two events: the woman has been ill for twelve years, whilst the little girl is twelve years old; the woman is losing blood: her life is draining from her, just as the little girl loses her life; Jesus calls the woman 'daughter' as He journeys to heal the daughter of Jairus; in all of the scenes of the Gospel, crowds are present. Finally, and significantly, both of the miracles involve touch: Jairus requests that Jesus lays His hands on the little girl; the woman touches Jesus; and finally, Jesus takes the girl by the hand and raises her up.

Touch is incredibly important. Again, we've been reminded of this in the months of social distancing: the simplest forms of touch matter to us. In the sacraments, the Lord comes to touch us through the physical signs of His grace: the water of baptism, oil of confirmation, the bread and wine which become His Body and Blood in the Eucharist. Touch matters; the sacraments matter. Physical expression is vital for human relationships, and it's also vital in our closeness to the Lord. And touch is a personal encounter: it is nearly always only between two people. Even the most platonic forms of touch – a simple handshake, for example – can only be between two people at any one time. Touch invites us to be conscious of another individual, not of a multitude. You can't touch a whole crowd at the same time!

The crowds today gather around Jesus at the start of the Gospel, as He teaches on the seashore. They press around Him as He makes His journey to the home of Jairus. Crowds are gathered there, mourning for the little girl who by this time has died. So many people were present, yet it was only the woman and the girl, the ones touched by Jesus, whose lives were saved and transformed by Him. There is an important question here for all of us: do I simply go along with the crowd, bumping into Jesus occasionally but never consciously reaching out to Him? Or do I actively turn to Him, searching for that personal encounter which is life-giving and life-transforming? It's perhaps significant that the woman in the Gospel and Jairus only reach out to Jesus because of their desperation. Perhaps we are the same: we turn to the Lord more earnestly when life is hard, when we have no answer to our problems. But Jesus wants to give us more than help in times of crisis! The woman who was cured was content just to have touched Jesus' cloak and be healed of her illness, freed from her problem. But Jesus wanted her to have more: He sought her out, offering her the chance of a personal encounter. She came before Him in great fear, trembling, wondering if she would be accepted. It was then that she discovered His love. So the Gospel is saying to

us: reach out to Jesus! Even if you are unsure of Him or perhaps even fearful, reach out, trust Him, believe that He will accept and love you.

Before Jesus and the others resume their journey, they discover that the girl has died. “Why put the Master to any more trouble”, the crowds say to Jairus. There’s nothing more that He can do, so they think. Don’t bother Him. Sometimes people who pray a lot are referred to as “God-botherers.” It seems to me that today’s Gospel says this: Feel free to bother God. He wants to be bothered, to be put to trouble for you. And there is *always* something He can do, as Jairus and his family are about to discover.

When the Lord reaches Jairus’ house, there is a crowd there too, weeping and wailing in grief. It’s quite likely that they were professional mourners, hired by the family to express their grief, as was the custom of the time. It seems obvious that their grief isn’t genuine when we consider how quick they are to laugh at Jesus when He suggests that He can wake the child from the sleep of death. They do not believe Him; maybe they even fear for their income. So, we’re told, Jesus “turned them all out” of the house, just as He later turned the money changers out of the Temple. And He takes with Him the child’s parents, and Peter, James and John, His inner circle. These accompany Him as He goes to the girl. The crowds are now turned away: only those with faith can enter this inner sanctum, where the power of God is most visibly at work. Where would we rather be? Outside, in the crowd, undisturbed by the presence and power of God? Or will we actively reach out to Him, for that touch, that personal encounter, which brings life and salvation? This means, quite simply: opening our hearts to Him in prayer, really seeking to form and deepen a relationship of love with Him; it means approaching the sacraments with a real awareness of who we meet in these encounters; it means involving Jesus in every decision and every moment of our lives. All of us here today are, at the very least, walking along with the crowd, bumping into Jesus along the way. He’s not a stranger to any of us. But He wants to give us so much more.

Fr Andrew

