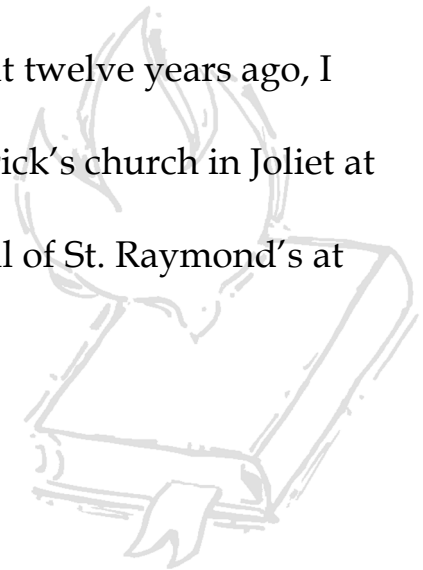


Homily
13th Sunday OT - B
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
June 26-27, 2021

Wis 1: 13-15; 2: 23-24
Ps 30: 2, 4, 5-6. 11, 12, 13
2 Cor 8: 7, 9, 13-15
Mk 5: 21-43

One of the reasons that I have asked our parish secretaries to address is putting both parish calendars from St. Anne's and Saint Patrick's on the parish website, so that all activities are easily accessible to anyone who wanted to see what is going on at our parishes. The other reason I have asked the secretaries to do this is because in my history as a Catholic priest, I have been notoriously double and triple booked for various services at the parishes I have served.

Every so often, I am booked simultaneously at concurrent activities at the parishes I have served, whether it be a baptism at one parish and a wedding at another. I distinctly remember about twelve years ago, I ended up celebrating a quinceañera and St. Patrick's church in Joliet at 1:00 p.m. and then rushing over to the Cathedral of St. Raymond's at



2:00 p.m. for a wedding I was asked to celebrate. I remember having to dash through the quinceañera so that I could be on time for the wedding at the adjoining parish.

On that occasion, I knew very well how important that marriage liturgy was for me to celebrate in 2009. In my experience as a priest, I have come to find that when people are suffering, when people are dying or in need of sacramental ministry, a priest can serve as the vessel for the Holy Spirit, a person who easily can become the best friend or the worst enemy of those in need – the best friend if you allow God to work through you and the worst enemy if you do not show up at all. As I have stated over and over again, the sacraments are not about me – the sacraments focus on the grace that the Lord offers through me. If you show up and minister to people to show them how much God cares for their needs, that moment can serve as a powerful moment in the life of faith.

So twelve years ago, I was serving as pastor at St. Patrick's Church in Joliet. Prior to that assignment, I had served as an associate pastor at the

neighboring St. Paul's Church in the same city. Over at St. Paul's a family named Zielinski had attended weekly Mass; they endured a horrible tragedy when the parent's twenty-eight-year daughter Marie died after suffering through cancer at such a young age.

At the time of Marie's death, the family obviously was grief-stricken – no parent wishes to attend the funeral of one of their children. The mother was beside herself. The father to comfort his wife, often in vain. Marie was young; Marie served as a teacher for young children. I was told that Marie was exceedingly energetic and had this vibrant personality that affected those with whom Marie was acquainted. When someone this young dies, family and friends have such a difficult time enduring a loss that they did.

The pastor of St. Paul's at the time was not able to minister to the family, so the family called me, as I had served their needs in the past, in God's name. I had an opportunity to speak to the family, spend quality time with them and then celebrate that funeral in 2009 for Maria.

What I normally do is when I celebrate weddings, quinceañeras or

funerals, I try to learn stories about the person on which the service focuses. At the Mass, I attempt to take the gospel message and somehow connect it with the person about whom the Mass is celebrated. In preparation for this funeral service, I was told how cancer had affected Marie's life and how she prepared for what she would have to endure.

I remember well the hour I spent at Marie's home in June of 2009, preparing for this funeral Mass. Mother Jean and I talked for an hour about her daughter's strength of will to endure the cancer that slowly was corrupting her body. Jean told me that through this ordeal, her daughter lived a stoic life as well, dedicating the remainder of her time on earth teaching the young children of Farragat Elementary School in Joliet. One of her co-workers, Georgia Balderas, wrote the following about Marie in preparation for my funeral homily three years ago:

Although Marie was struggling with illness, she came to work every day making an impact and never lost her patience within the classroom. In fact, not many people even knew that she was ill. When her illness precluded her from working, it was always her priority to leave lesson plans that were detailed and in order. Her students always came first. In her short time in education, Marie made a lasting impact on many of her students, as well as many of her

coworkers. Her commitment to education and her personal strength and courage is to be admired. She will be greatly missed.

Aunque Marie estaba luchando con la enfermedad, venía a trabajar todos los días haciendo un impacto y nunca perdió la paciencia dentro del aula. De hecho, no mucha gente sabía que estaba enferma. Cuando su enfermedad le impedía trabajar, siempre era su prioridad dejar planes de clase detallados y en orden. Sus alumnos siempre fueron lo primero. En su corto tiempo en la educación, Marie hizo un impacto duradero en muchos de sus estudiantes, así como en muchos de sus compañeros de trabajo. Su compromiso con la educación y su fuerza personal y coraje son de admirar. Se la echará mucho de menos.

And then there were Marie's journal entries. Her mother was kind enough to share some of these entries with me covering the months prior to her death. As I reflected on this young woman's life this weekend, I could not help but think of the gift of life and love that she embraced even as battled the sufferings through her last days...

12/19/08

...Maybe God really does have a purpose for what is happening, for all the pain, all the suffering. I am a better person because of it. Through this I have really changed. I value things like I never have before. I realize how important things are I never thought were important before. How each person in my life is special. How much I value my family ... and other people in my life. How important it is

to take the time to enjoy every moment and value and learn from every experience.

... Tal vez Dios realmente tiene un propósito para lo que está sucediendo, para todo el dolor, todo el sufrimiento. Soy una mejor persona por eso. A través de esto realmente he cambiado. Valoro cosas como nunca lo había hecho. Me doy cuenta de lo importantes que son las cosas que nunca pensé que fueran importantes antes. Cómo cada persona en mi vida es especial. Cuánto valoro a mi familia... y otras personas en mi vida. Lo importante que es tomarse el tiempo para disfrutar de cada momento y valor y aprender de cada experiencia.

4/16/09

I know you are working miracles in my body and healing me every day. Even though the gains are small – they are still there. Lord, thank you for opening my eyes to you – the most important part of this journey. Thank you for showing me how many important people I have in my life. Thank you for all the times you have healed me, Lord... I already believe I am healed by you, Lord Jesus, so I am not going to doubt my faith at all. But when I do get weak I will repeat to you, "I believe, help me believe more."

Sé que estás obrando milagros en mi cuerpo y sanándome todos los días. A pesar de que las ganancias son pequeñas, todavía están allí. Señor, gracias por abrir mis ojos a ti – la parte más importante de este viaje. Gracias por mostrarme cuántas personas importantes tengo en mi vida. Gracias por todas las veces que me has sanado, Señor... Ya creo que soy sanado por ti, Señor Jesús, así que no voy a dudar de mi fe en absoluto. Pero cuando me debilite te repetiré: "Creo, ayúdame a creer más".

4/19/09

Lord, right now I'm having a lot of pain. I know the devil is trying to get me down, but I am yours, I belong to you. The devil cannot have control of me, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I belong to God. By his stripes I am healed! Get away from me Satan! You cannot hurt me anymore I belong to Jesus Christ, by his stripes I am healed, ... you cannot hurt me anymore, by the blood of Jesus I am healed! Please send me comfort and peace. Lord God, praise you for all the healing you have given me. Lord, make our faith like their faith. I know we are still learning how to really 'have faith' in God.

Señor, en este momento estoy teniendo mucho dolor. Sé que el diablo está tratando de bajarme, pero yo soy tuyo, te pertenezco. El diablo no puede tener el control de mí, en el nombre del Padre, el Hijo y el Espíritu Santo, pertenezco a Dios. ¡Por sus rayas estoy sanado! ¡Ayúdame de mí Satanás! Ya no me puedes herir, pertenezco a Jesucristo, por sus rayas soy sanado, ... ¡ya no puedes lastimarme, por la sangre de Jesús soy sanado! Por favor, envíenme consuelo y paz. Señor Dios, alabado seas por toda la curación que me has dado. Señor, haz que nuestra fe sea como su fe. Sé que todavía estamos aprendiendo cómo realmente "tener fe" en Dios.

For the sake of this family, there was no way that I *wasn't* going to celebrate that wedding Mass at St. Ray's, regardless of my busy schedule. I also noticed how sister Marie remembered the anniversary of her sister's death twelve years ago last week. On the social media platform of Facebook, Marie's sister Gail lamented her sister's loss. Because I had recorded the Mass for this week in advance online, I sent

the Mass video to Gail and her family, who seemed very grateful that I remembered her sister's passing after all these years.

Subsequent to this funeral, I celebrated that double-booked wedding at St. Raymond's Cathedral three years later in 2012, a wedding I was determined to make special for the Zielinski and Weber families. A few years later, I celebrated the baptism of Gail's first child; next month, I will celebrate the second baptism for a couple now married just under ten years.

When I reflect on today's gospel reading, I've come to realize that when we're talking about healing, there is the physical healing and there is the spiritual healing. We know that we experienced two deaths in life - the bodily and the soul. When we left the Garden of Eden, the body's death was inevitable - if we have faith in God, we are spared the soul's death and spend the rest of our existence with God in heaven. As I learned then as I do now, when Marie offered those testimonials, she taught me how to live, even in the face of bodily death. If we possess the faith of Jairus (a man who was not even a Jew at the time), if we put our

faith in God, great things can happen, if not for our bodies, then certainly for our souls.

I have come to believe throughout my priesthood that the great miracle that happens in my life, the only thing that really matters in my life (and I mean this sincerely), *is you*. You are the miracle in my life. Like a parent who loves their children (even when a parent has to make difficult choices in life), God has sent me here to be with all of you to work through me, to take care of you. As long as I can do that, I do believe that miracles exist.

Let us never lose our faith - our faith in God or our faith in each other. Let us realize that God enters our hearts and wants to heal us, especially our souls. God wants to love us so that we can avoid that second death. Let us realize how deeply God loves us in our lives, even when, at times, we might not love God or even forget about God. Let us never forget about that love and grace of our Lord, as modeled by Jairus, Marie, the Weber and Zielinski families and a great number (if not all) of you, as we share this message of hope to the people that we

meet. This is our prayer.