

Homily for 13th Sunday B

This month is the twenty third anniversary of the death of my father and the first anniversary of the death of my mother. This month July 4 and 24 will always be an odd days for me and those close to my parents. Filled with sadness that they are no longer with us, but also with joy remembering who they were and what they did for us. Today's readings are very reassuring for me, and I hope also for everyone who has lost someone close to them. We start in the book of Wisdom, with a small answer to the question we all ask when we lose someone, the question "Why?" God created us to live and, it is his desire and intention that we prosper in health of body and mind. So, "death" is totally opposed to God the author of life. God wants us to live! Yet death came into our world. This was why Christ accepted death and poverty that we ourselves might live and be rich. Death is not acceptable in so much of modern culture. Yet death comes in so many ways to all of us. Everyone seems to want to fight against physical death. It is a disturbance and agony to think of death. *One Sunday at Mass as the priest was giving his homily, a little baby in the front row suddenly started crying loudly. The mother did her best to pacify the child, but nothing worked. So finally, she got up and started to walk down the aisle to take the baby into the cry room. The priest stopped his preaching, and very compassionately called out to the mother, "That's OK! You don't have to leave. The child isn't disturbing me." The young woman turned around and said, "No, pardon me Father, but you're disturbing my child!"* In the second reading, Saint Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to share what money they have with those who have less. This is another form of dying to oneself. In much of modern culture today, the emphasis is on getting as much for oneself as is possible. This is another expression of the fear of death. We have a fear of not having all that we want. It is important to recognize that very often what we want and what we need are very different. We have to learn to die to ourselves in order to recognize this difference.

The gospel reading of today narrates to us two stories. Both, stories of women. One story is contained within another. Both are stories about women who are 'dead' in their own way. The two women represent two different age groups: the younger one has died before time, at the onset of adolescence, and the cause of her death is unknown; the older woman is socially dead. Jesus raises both to life – new life. At the heart of raising these women to life and restoring their humanity is the humane compassion of Jesus. In both cases, there is touching involved. In both cases, that touching was a taboo-broken. The bleeding woman was not supposed to touch anyone; she would render unclean everything that she touched. But that was a special touch even for Jesus. In that touch her faith is made tangible, and Jesus appreciates it: "My daughter," he said, "your faith has restored you to health; go in peace and be free of your complaint" (Mk 5:34). In the second case, Jesus breaks the taboo by touching a dead child. Touching the dead body would have rendered him unclean. He could not have participated in social interaction without having a bath following such a contact with the dead body. He could have worked the miracle just by uttering a word. But touching was necessary to re-establish the humanity of the child, at the risk of Jesus being impure. And finally, here is yet another powerful expression of Jesus' humanity: he told them to give her something to eat.

God is very observant and nothing changes the intention or plan of God for us. Even when we desert him, the plan for life, prosperity and good health remains concrete. This is due to the fact of the covenant that the Trinitarian God made in order to create humans in their image and likeness. Hence God's plan for us remains unchanged: It is life not death, good health not sickness, peace not war, unity not division, love not hatred, and many more good things. All we need to do is to continue to say yes to these with our faith.