

Homily for 13th Sunday of the Year

It would be easy to have missed the first few words of today's first reading – "Death was not God's doing" – just let them sink in for a moment because we can spend a lot of time blaming God when someone we love dies before their time, or the cure we pray for doesn't happen. God often gets blamed for those who die of hunger, or as a result of violence or war or natural disasters. How could God let this happen, people often ask. "Death was not God's doing", rather we are made in the image of God's own nature, which is another way of saying that we are made to live.

Last week we stood in awe of Jesus who wielded the power of the Creator by stilling the storm and calming the wind, this week we see Jesus having power over illness and death. Jesus stands before us, not only as one who inspires awe but also as a model of generosity after whom we can pattern our lives. The invitation is to put ourselves in the gospel story. Jairus an important official, throws himself to the ground pleading with Jesus to heal his daughter. Into this urgency an unnamed and ritually impure woman, pushes her way through the crowd, violating both religious and social prohibitions, believing that even to touch the clothes Jesus is wearing will bring her healing, and determined to do so. Her faith and persistence are rewarded and she is cured and invited to go in peace.

By this stage Jairus was anything but at peace, time was passing, this interruption, at best a nuisance, at worst, a delay that could spell disaster for his daughter. He then receives the news every parent never wants to hear, 'your child is dead.' Jesus then speaks to Jairus for the first time, saying, 'Do not be afraid, only have faith.' What must he have been thinking as they approached his house and saw the professional mourners outside. Any last hope now gone, the evidence of the death of his daughter before his eyes. But Jesus asks the mourners why they are making such a commotion when the child is sleeping. This provokes mocking laughter and a total lack of faith, but Jesus persists and tells the little girl to get up, and her parents to feed her.

This passage shows us that Jesus can lead us to life even in the midst of death. He is interested in the wellbeing of everyone, even those who may not be highly valued by society, women, children, the chronically ill. He opposes death because he is committed to life, and the raising of Jairus' daughter, is a sign of his future victory over death through his resurrection, a victory he shares with us. It is also an example to us to share what we receive as life enhancing gifts with those in need, those in the throes of death dealing poverty or illness, those to whom life has not been kind, those who have been denied the rights we take for granted every day. Sometimes this will be a willingness to share our material possessions, even when we have worked hard to obtain them. At other times it may mean that our energy is drained in our service of others, a service which can take many different forms. "Death was not God's doing", nor is it ours, rather Jesus came so that we may have life and live it to the full, and we do this by our faith, our persistence, and by turning suffering and mourning into dancing.

Bidding Prayers for the 13th Sunday of the Year

Celebrant:

We give thanks to God for all we have received, especially God's merciful love to each one of us, and we bring before God the needs of the world, the Church and ourselves.

Reader:

For the diocese of Leeds under the patronage of Our Lady of Unfailing Help – that Mary will guide Bishop Marcus as he exercises his ministry of leadership with courage and compassion.

Lord in your mercy

For the family of nations – that governments and leaders will work together to establish a real and lasting peace based on justice and equality for all.

Lord in your mercy

For those who suffer in body, mind or spirit – that that and their families and carers will receive the love and support they need at this time.

Lord in your mercy

For ourselves – that we will be generous both with our possessions and our time, reaching out to those in most need.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the covid pandemic, for Marie Therese Porisse whose funeral takes place this coming Monday, and Francis O'Gara, Elizabeth Lally, Peter Bennison and Michael Bernard Crewdson whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Our Lady of Unfailing health as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

Merciful God, your Son raised the daughter of Jairus to life and bestowed on his family the gift of faith. Through the Spirit of life renew in us the desire to serve you, proclaiming to the whole world that Christ is the way to new and unending life. Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen