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Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Thomas Gumbleton | Jul. 2, 2009 The Peace Pulpit

If we listen very carefully to the readings today, even more than just learn in our minds, we will experience more deeply who God is as God is revealed in Jesus. We will come to know Jesus much more deeply in his humanness, something that we can relate to and try to become like him as we get to know him. In the second lesson, St. Paul reminds us of the generosity of Jesus who, though he was a god, did not think his equality with God something to be clung to, but emptied himself.

As Paul puts it, he became poor, letting go of his eternal, everlasting identity as the Son of God in power. He became one like us in every way except sin, truly a kind of poverty. Paul says it?s the way Jesus could show how God is generous to us without limit. But it?s even more in the gospel that we discover the kind of human being Jesus is. First of all, I think we learn from the true examples in the gospel, how Jesus has a deep sense of the worth, the value of every human person.

Today's Readings
Wisdom 1:13-15, 2:23-24
Psalm 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11, 12, 13
2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15
Mark 5:21-43
Full text of the readings [1]

That woman, by this time in her life, she would be what we call a street person. She had used up all of her resources and she had been suffering this affliction for 12 years. Mark calls it a flow of blood; it was some kind of menstrual disorder that caused bleeding and she was always hemorrhaging. It also made her virtually unclean; she couldn?t go to the temple, so she was, in a way, an outcast, and that?s why she was even afraid to come up and speak to Jesus directly. She thought he would rebuke her, send her away, who was she?

And yet when she dares to touch the cloak of Jesus, she?s healed. She experiences this healing and Jesus knows it. That?s why he says, ?Who touched me?? But, the crowd is so big, the disciples say, ?Well, how can you ask who touched you? Everybody is touching you,? but Jesus knew there was one person, and that women comes up behind him and, as Mark tells us, falls at his feet. She?s afraid, afraid because she has made him virtually unclean.

She?s afraid he will be angry with her, but instead as we hear in the gospel, Jesus values this person and raises her up by affirming her and what she did: ?Your faith has healed you. Go in peace.? That?s the kind of person Jesus is -- one who reaches out to anyone and everyone, and is not upset that people disturb what he?s doing. Now he was on his way somewhere else, but he stopped immediately to deal with this woman, to treat her with respect and reverence. Then when he gets to the house, he does the same thing with the 12-year-old girl.

The child was not as valued as an adult person would be, but to Jesus, everyone is of supreme value, worth and dignity. He tells the people who are wailing and lamenting, who have lost faith, to leave. They laugh at him, but then he reaches out so gently, takes the hand of the child and says, ?Get up,? and then he adds that special touch, ?Get her something to eat.? He?s so concerned about this young child. He wants her to be healed and wants her to be nurtured and loved. Jesus shows us then that every person is of supreme worth and value.

What?s also clear, as Jesus interacts in these two incidents, is that for Jesus, it?s very important for him to have a personal relationship with each of us. See, that woman had been healed when she touched his cloak, but that wasn?t enough for Jesus. He did not want people to think of him as a wonder worker, someone who does magic; you just touch him and you?re healed. That wasn?t Jesus. He wanted to interact with the person, to look into her eyes, see who she really is, let her see his love for her, so he interacts with the person.

He doesn?t just heal by ?remote control,? you might say, or something like that. No; he has to be in relationship with that person. The same thing is true with the little girl. He wants to connect with her, so he goes right in the room. You know he?s God, he could have said to Jairus, when Jairus said, ?Come to my home,? ?I?ll say a prayer for her. She?ll be all right.? No; Jesus wanted to go and be with her, be with the parents, interact with them, develop a relationship with them.

That?s how Jesus is with every person. As you go through the gospels, every time you see Jesus interacting with people, it?s always with that interest in who each one is and the worth of every person. Jesus doesn?t ever treat people with a kind of neglect or formality; it?s always personal interaction, love, a connection. Of course, as we come to know Jesus in this way, we?ll find it very consoling because Jesus, in this Eucharist, is coming into our presence in a special way.

Jesus is in each one of us. We connect with Jesus when we connect with one another, and Jesus is reaching out to every one of us with the same unlimited love that he showed toward that woman, that he showed toward the little child. Jesus is looking into the eyes of each of us as we come together to celebrate this Eucharist, and Jesus is deepening his relationship with every one of us. We?re becoming more and more his friends, and that is something that I think each of us can rejoice in and be consoled by.

But it?s also challenging to get to know Jesus, because as we prayed in the opening prayer, we asked God to help us to live always in the light of Jesus; in other words, to follow his way, so that means we too have to develop a deep sense of the worth of every person, no matter what other ethnic group they might belong to, religious group. We have to think of Muslims as our brothers and sisters with the supreme worth that every human being has. Nothing -- race, gender, nationality, ethnic group -- nothing can ever diminish the worth of any person. Each one is of supreme value before God. We have to develop the same attitude.

We also have to, I think, develop a sense of wanting to relate with people. We?re being asked today to contribute in the second collection for the works of the Holy Father, and probably most of us will do it. We write a check, drop it in the basket, and that?s it, but that isn?t really enough. That?s a good thing, but it?s not enough. We have to find a way that in our lives, we too do what Jesus did -- interact, engage with the poor.

It?s easy to write a check, but to stop and talk to a homeless person ... you see them all over now when you come up to an intersection. There?s always someone there asking for help. Most of the time, we pass by, but wouldn?t it be better and more like Jesus if some of the times, we stopped and engaged in conversation, got to know this person? Wouldn?t it be good if some time we went to work at a soup kitchen where the poor come every day to be fed? Engage, as Jesus did with those people in the gospel.

That?s how we will develop, not only a deeper sense of the worth of every person, and not only develop a deeper sense of relationship with other people, develop friendships that will be enriching in our lives, but it?s also how we will deepen our relationship with God.

That will bring us the supreme blessing that we hear about in our first lesson today: ?God did not make death, nor does God rejoice in the destruction of the living. Since God has created everything, all creatures of the universe are for our good and the netherworld has no dominion over the earth because those who are just, who relate with God, are never submitted to death.?

See, as we begin to relate to God through one another, through those to whom we reach out, we guarantee that we will never die, that we will live with God forever. This can give us a great sense of hope, peace and joy to know that death has no dominion over us ever, because we have developed a relationship with God through reaching out to others.

[This homily was preached at St. Hilary Parish, Redford, Mich.]

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