

Homily – June 30th, 2024 – 13th Sunday of Ordinary Time



The late Fr. Henri Nouwen shared an encounter he had with a man who was dying in the hospital. The dying man said to him, “My whole life’s work was continually being interrupted

until I finally realized that these interruptions were my life’s work.” We tend to think that in the past, life was less complicated, less multi-tasking, simpler and more trouble-free. People got up with the sun, when down with the sun, and didn’t start a second task until the first task was done. There is probably much truth in that, but in today’s gospel Jesus is doing his own form of multi-tasking, of juggling more than one demand of life at a time.

I still secretly complain (and now it’s public because I’m telling you), that one of the worst parts of my vocation as a priest is that nothing ever gets finished. Nothing ever gets neatly filed away, never to come back again. I just have to accept, like the dying man in the hospital, that interruptions are my life and stop trying to leapfrog them so as to get back on track. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been interrupted by a knock at the door of the rectory when all I wanted was a little quiet time to prepare a homily. Only later did I realize, the “enacted” homily was being played out by the one knocking at the door. If you have ever raised even just one child, your life was, and probably still is, constantly interrupted.

We don't always get the teachings of Jesus directly. Sometimes he tells his disciples stuff in private that we don't get, so we have to pay close attention to the disruptions. We don't know what Jesus was teaching the crowd, but we do get the interruption of his teaching when they passed the paralyzed man through the roof that Jesus might heal him. In almost all the healing stories in the gospels, Jesus on his way somewhere until someone cries out to him in their need. He never gets his teachings out. How he became so popular, I have no idea! The late Malcolm Muggeridge, a journalist and author, wrote a popular book on the life of Mother Teresa entitled Something Beautiful for God. In it he writes, "***The incredible thing is, that Mother Teresa has no free time to read the news or watch TV, yet she can sense the troubled spots in the world and see the nature of the healing necessary.***" Mother Teresa sounds a lot like Jesus in today's gospel, doesn't she?

Jesus is interrupted by a synagogue leader named Jairus. He didn't seek out Jairus; Jairus sought Jesus out. Jesus' intention is to keep on walking. Apparently, all you have to do to get Jesus' attention is clear your throat. All you have to do is invite him, and he's right there. It's in the story about Jesus walking on the water. It says ***he was going to pass them by*** (Mk. 6:48) until they called out in distress thinking they had seen a ghost, so he stopped his evening stroll on the water, stepped onto the boat and calmed both the wind and their fear. It's also in the Emmaus story. The disciples on the road invited this mystery guest, Jesus, ***to stay with them because it was almost evening. So, he went in and stayed with them.*** It's just that simple. All you need to do is reach out, and he's right there with you. He senses the pain in the world and is just waiting for us to admit our need for healing. He is the

doctor, and all of us are in need of healing. Pain pushed away, instead of being faced, can never be healed.

Having said that, reaching out in need isn't always easy. The synagogue leader, Jairus, took a risk in reaching out to Jesus. After all, it was synagogue leaders, Jairus' colleagues, who ran Jesus out of town and threatened to kill him. However, the wellbeing of Jairus' dying daughter was more important than remaining popular with his colleagues. So, Jairus reached out to Jesus knowing he might be considered a fool in the eyes of his colleagues. For Jesus, that is what faith is...reaching out to the One who has always been reaching out to you.

I tend to see a lot of reaching out as annoying interruptions. Jesus sees peoples' reaching out not as interruptions but as cries for wholeness. To be healed simply means to be made whole. People aren't trying to be nuisances; they are trying to be whole.

I could be wrong, but I think the two greatest pains in life are loneliness and feeling life is meaningless. Although it will never show up on a certificate as the cause of death, I know loneliness is a silent deadly killer. Not to feel connected or important to anyone is one of the worst feelings anyone can ever have. As far as meaning goes, apparently meaning is the only thing the soul cannot live without. When we cannot find meaning in what we do, in who we are, or in who we spend time with, it seems to be all downhill.

While Jesus is dealing with Jairus' crisis with his dying daughter, he is interrupted by a woman who has been hemorrhaging blood for 12 years and is only getting worse. She has been suffering in silence, and in shame, for 12 long years. Jesus doesn't seek her out, but I think he's aware that there is someone in the crowd who is hurting. All she does is touch Jesus' outer garment and he feel power go out of him. The gesture of touching someone's cloak in the anonymity of a crowd doesn't seem like a big deal, but it was. It took great courage for this woman to reach out. She hopes, like Jairus hopes, that the reward will be so much greater than the risk. It always is with this Jesus.

This nameless woman risks getting herself and Jesus in trouble if she is exposed as the one who touched Jesus. Jewish law clearly forbade contact with blood and contact with a dead body. In this story, within a story, we have both a bleeding woman and a 12-year-old girl who dies...blood and a corpse. Jesus has no problem reaching back, although he risks getting in trouble with his own religious leaders. Jesus cares little about his reputation; he cares immensely that people are healed.

Jesus stops the flow of blood in the woman and starts the flow of blood in the 12-year-old girl. Although they look like physical cures, they are really spiritual healings. Cures are temporary fixes. Even with a cure, we are all going to fall apart some day and die. Healings, on the other hand, are eternal. Healings are about restoring relationships, overcoming loneliness, and reconnecting us to God and the human family. The woman's bleeding, by Law, excluded her from Church and society. And, of course, death pulls us apart from our loved ones. Blood and death were the ultimate forms of isolation. Jesus' compassion reaches into our lives,

reaches past the blood and death, and pulls us close to him. Our little lives have been touched by the one who is the Resurrection and the Life. Jesus' action flowed from his interior union with God. To be touched by Jesus was to have the flow of eternal life, who is God, touching you. In a sense, Jesus didn't do anything! What he did was to allow the flow of life, the Divine, God, to flow through him and into any person who simply ask for it. Anyone who touched Jesus was healed, which made physical cures redundant and even unnecessary.

I am no Scripture scholar, but apparently the literal translation of "Telitha cum," the Aramaic words spoken by Jesus is not "Little girl, get up!" but "Little lamb, get up." This little girl really did die. And Jesus, we believe, really is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Perhaps when he spoke these words, "Little lamb, get up" to the girl, it was a rehearsal for himself. As he himself laid in the tomb, he awaiting the same words from his Father, "Little lamb, get up." It's God's greatest delight—bringing life out of death.

Fr. Phil