

Homily

Mark 5: 21-43

- Today's Gospel reading teaches us three important things about Faith.
- First, faith is a gift given to each of us by God. We all have it. But like any gift we must open and use it. If you don't open the gift, you never know what is inside.
- Second, faith is a source of power for us. Faith gives us the strength to trust enough, to believe enough. Enough that we open the door of our life – our heart, our soul - and let Jesus in. Give Jesus permission to work in and through us. Faith gives us the power to dig down deep into ourselves, our innermost part, to where God dwells. And to know God is there and to trust God loves us and will guide us.
- And Third, faith requires we stay in touch with Jesus (not physically, but spiritually). Faith prompts us to constantly reach out and touch Jesus and to let Jesus touch our minds and hearts and souls.
- Gift, Power, and Touch – three important aspects of faith. We examples of each in today's Gospel reading.
- Our Gospel reading presents us with individuals who are at different stages in their faith journey. They differ as to the extent they have opened and are using the gift of faith.
- As we come to the end of June, we also arrive at the close of another school year for many. And it is that time when students receive their report cards. And report cards assign grades (letters or numbers) which reflect student effort and performance in particular areas of study.
- I thought it might be interesting to consider those individuals in today's Gospel reading and assign them a grade that assesses their faith in Jesus.
- Let's keep the grading scale simple: A= very good, B= good, C= average and D= needs improvement.
- Let's start with Jairus. He was a prominent Jewish man in his community – one of the officials of the synagogue in his town. Yet he humbly approached Jesus asking for a cure for his dying daughter. He knew who Jesus was, what Jesus could do and he fell at Jesus' feet and pleaded. This was a bold, risky act for a

prominent, Jewish, religious public figure. Yet his faith let him take that risk. It is also important to notice Jairus' faith remained strong even when word came that his daughter had died. Jesus told Jairus: "Don't fear, only believe." Jairus did just that. He held onto his faith and continued to lead Jesus to his home and his daughter. He trusted in Jesus and leaned heavily on the power of that gift of faith. We saw that faith rewarded. I'd say Jairus earned a grade of "A".

- What about some of the others? What about the person dispatched to tell Jairus his daughter had died, saying "Why trouble the teacher further?" This person saw Jesus as nothing more than a teacher. He didn't realize Jesus' power over death. I'd assign him a grade of "D".
- Then there were those in Jairus' village who ridiculed and laughed at Jesus when Jesus told them the little girl was only asleep. We read Jesus sent them away. I'd say a "D" grade was in order here as well.
- It is also interesting to consider where the Apostles were on that faith scale at this point in their relationship with Jesus. In last weeks Gospel reading we saw them on a boat being tossed about in a bad storm. In panic they yelled at Jesus: "Don't you care we are going to die?" It wasn't that they momentarily forgot Jesus was in the boat – they still weren't sure who Jesus really was.
- And in today's Gospel reading when Jesus asks them "Who touched me?" they answer almost sarcastically: Don't you see the huge crowd? They are **all** pressing in on you. What do you mean who touched you?"
- The Apostles failed to realize how important each individual is to Jesus, how Jesus can recognize anyone who reaches out to touch him-especially those in need.
- At this point in time the Apostles faith was average at best. I'd give them a grade of "C". It is encouraging for us to remember however, that their faith did grow as they followed Jesus, listened to Jesus teachings and tried their best to imitate Him. Eventually they raised their grade to an "A". Proof there is hope for us all !!
- There is one other person in today's gospel passage to which we need to assign a grade. The sick woman who reached out to touch Jesus' garment, so that she could be healed. Let's say right up front she earned a grade of "A".

- I saved her for last because I find her story and her faith to be a great assurance of Jesus' personal love and care for each one of us, you and me!
- Sick people in Jesus' day were looked upon as sinners who were being punished for their sins. She was sick for 12 years so it is safe to say she was thought of as an outcast in her society.
- Yet look at her faith in Jesus. It was amazing! "If I could just touch His cloak, I shall be cured."
- She had tremendous faith in Jesus' healing power. But perhaps more importantly, she had faith that she mattered to Jesus. That to Jesus, her life mattered, every life matters; even when the world says otherwise. Imagine how our world would be if we all just remembered that.
- She trusted Jesus, relied on Him. Her faith allowed her to take the risk and reach out. And Jesus didn't let her down. Jesus was keenly aware of her faith, her touch. He stopped in the middle of a huge crowd and insisted on finding her. Nothing would stop Jesus from a personal encounter with this woman of faith.
- And when they came face to face we see her faith rewarded. Jesus gave her healing, peace and also dignity when He called her "daughter".
- The same healing, peace and dignity given to this woman is available to each of us – because we matter to Jesus.
- And so this week's Gospel challenges us to ask some questions of ourselves: Have I opened my gift of faith? Am I using it well? What grade would I give myself when it comes to my faith life?

An extra thought if you feel like reading on:

- Did you notice today's Gospel reading is different from most others? There is a story inside a story. The Gospel starts with Jairus' story, takes a time out and tells us the story of the sick woman, then goes back to conclude the Jairus story.
- There's a valuable lesson here for us.
- Jesus planned on doing one thing (tending to Jairus' need) but is suddenly interrupted (by the woman) and pulled in another direction.
- Isn't life like that sometimes? Full of changes and interruptions to our plans. We plan on going someplace then one of our child runs a fever; we think our career is going fine then up comes a new job

offer or worse, a layoff. We chart out a plan for the coming year but suddenly we are called to deal with an illness (our own or that of a loved one) and all plans change.

- During these times we can get hope and encouragement by looking at this story inside a story. Looking at what Jesus did when He was pulled off course.
- He paid attention to what was placed in front of Him. He bought love and goodness to the moment, wherever He found Himself. He saw the unexpected interruption as an opportunity not an obstacle. An opportunity to bring love and healing and the presence of God.
- We need to remember this so we don't miss those opportunities to draw close to God, to bring God's love to others.
- Our ability to see opportunity rather than obstacle has everything to do with faith: the Gift, the Power and the Touch.