

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B, June 26-27, 2021

A priest tells a story about a woman from a parish he once served – I'll call her Iris – who experienced a parent's nightmare: her son died as a young man. Iris had also lost her husband a few years earlier, but losing her son she said was incomparably worse. A few weeks after the funeral, the priest visited Iris and she said that she was very confused. After a month or two the priest stopped seeing Iris after Mass, so he visited her again. She said that her confusion had lifted and now she was outright angry at God. She said to him, "Listen, I've given God a lot. I went to church every week for fifty years. I prayed every day. I sent kids to Catholic schools. And what do I get in return? A dead son, that's what God gives me, I told him he was a lousy God and that I am giving up on him."

No need to defend God in that moment of her anger; God can take it. But the story does get one to think when illness lingers on and on with no relief in sight, or when death looms at the threshold of our child's life – sometimes sufferers will take measures that are out of the ordinary. Jairus a synagogue official, whose 12 year old daughter was dying, was one such desperate individual. The woman who was besieged with a hemorrhage for 12 years was another such desperate individual. Jairus apparently was beside himself as what he could do to rescue his daughter from the brink of death. Ordinarily as a synagogue official – a recognized religious leader, he would not humble himself at the feet of an itinerant healer! But Jairus' daughter's life hangs by a thread and he will try anything – even if it means ignoring the dignity of his position before some wandering preacher. "Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet, pleading with him earnestly."

The woman who had suffered from hemorrhages for twelve years was beside herself also. She had gone to doctor after doctor for 12 long years, only to have her hopes dashed again, and yet again as her illness only grew worse. Apparently, she was a woman of means; she had money to spend on doctors, and she exhausted her money seeking a cure. Desperate to end her suffering, she forsakes her dignity as a woman of means, and throws reserve aside and follows this popular healer, Jesus. Wiggling through the crowd, pressing with the common people in on Jesus, she grabs his cloak from behind.

Jairus, the synagogue official, and the woman with hemorrhages are not disappointed! Jairus' daughter regains her life. "Talitha Koum," Jesus says! "Get up little girl," or literally translated: "Little Lamb rise." And the woman with the hemorrhages, immediately ... felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction.

Our two gospel stories lead us to grapple with a mystery. Where is God in the midst of our suffering, our pain!? Where is God in the midst of our storms of our life? Why does God, whose love can be so visible in His touch, not prevent the tragic death of his beloved sons and daughters – especially children? Why does God even allow death, or create a world in which death even exists?

The Book of Wisdom tells us this weekend that "God did not make death nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living; rather, God formed humankind to be imperishable; the image of his own nature." And yet, we are still faced with the ongoing reality of humanity's living in a world of suffering and pain. While the scriptures afford us no conclusive answer to where is God in the midst of our storms? The gospels do implore us to have faith that God is with us, even if we can't say exactly where God is!

Mark gives us a clue this weekend when he describes the suffering of the hemorrhaging woman! He uses the Greek word "Paschein" – the very verb he uses to speak of Jesus' own passion, suffering and death – God has turned our suffering, our Passion, our death into something greater through Jesus – a Passover into life. Great faith is called for. Jairus' daughter is a sign of faith – the woman in hemorrhage is a sign of faith for us. Finally, Jesus is a greater sign of faith for – Jesus trusted that while God may not dispel the storms we go through, God will see us to a Passover to a full and complete healing beyond anything we can imagine.