

NOLI TIMERE

A Homily for the Thirteenth Sunday of the Year (B)

St Paul's Parish, Gävle, Sweden.

Texts: Wisdom 1: 13-15; 2: 23-24; Ps. 29: 2, 4-6.11-13; 2 Cor. 8:7.9.13-15; Mark5: 21-43.

“Do not be afraid; only have faith.” My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the Gospel Reading of today, like that of the last Sunday, is an important instruction on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. There are two stories in the text. One is about the Synagogue official and his sick daughter and the other is about a sick woman. The Synagogue official had faith in the Lord. He believed that he could heal his daughter who was “desperately sick.” The woman who was suffering from haemorrhage – who had suffered for twelve years and had spent all her resources with no positive result – had faith in the Lord and believed that if she could only touch the hem of the garment of the Lord she would be cured. Let us meditate carefully on what we have read. The woman’s story is presented here as an interruption – as something that could be put in parenthesis – of the main story, which is the story of the Synagogue official’s daughter. Yet, the instantaneous cure of the woman likely increased the faith of the official on the possibility of his daughter being healed.

My brothers and sisters, these stories are as important for us today as they have been for past generations of Christians.

All around us, there abound examples of difficulties that have defied solutions. Some of us are suffering from physical or psychological ailments. Some people are being eaten up by these ailments. What makes matters as bad as they are is that the society in which we live so emphasizes privacy and individuality that most victims are dying daily in silence. Let us pause and ponder: “Is there something in my life that is a chronic illness?” We may not have physical haemorrhage. But if we are alcohol, drug, sex or even Internet addicts, then the woman in the story gives us a good example of what we must do today. Perhaps we have been to psychologists, even psychiatrists, taken all kinds of medications and yet our condition has become worse. Today is the day that the Lord has given us to take a bold step. Like the woman, let us not allow anybody or anything to prevent us from reaching out to the Lord. No matter how sick we

are, no matter how serious our condition may be, all that the Lord asks of us is bold faith. This is the same kind of faith that the woman had when she said to herself, "If I can touch even his clothes, I shall be well again." I can guarantee that all those who have done what this woman in the story did have also been restored to good health. This should not surprise us, since as the Letter to the Hebrews tells us, "Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). Those among us who dare to present their own ailment to the Lord who is here present among us will experience the same healing from the Lord. He will address them in similar words, "My daughter/son, your faith has restored you to health; go in peace and be free from your complaint."

Maybe our quest is not just ourselves but our children. For some parents, their son or their daughter is the source of their unremitting high blood pressure. Maybe the child is physically healthy but his/her behaviour causes the parents such anxiety that can only be compared with that which made the Synagogue official to seek the Lord. But no matter what the case might be, physical, psychological or spiritual, I can guarantee that nothing is impossible for the Lord. Even when the experts have given up on your child, do not forget that the messengers who came from Synagogue official's home had similar bad news for him concerning his sick daughter. Here is what they told him: "Your daughter is dead: why put the Master to any further trouble?" Do not be discouraged by that. Jesus is hearing the discouraging message. And he has a different message for you: "Do not be afraid; only have faith." Even if people who are sympathetic to you over your suffering think that going to the Lord in prayer is a stupid, illogical or unscientific – if they laugh at what the Lord promises, do not be discouraged. Listen instead to what the Lord tells you, "This child is not dead but asleep."

There are many Christians before us who have imitated the Synagogue official. A clear example is St Monica. Her son, Augustine was gifted but chose a life outside the love of God, a life of dissipation. Monica refused to give up on him. She prayed and wept for no less than seventeen years. And the Lord, who is the Hope of all hopeless cases, wiped her tears. Her son changed and responded generously to the call of the Lord and became a Christian, a priest, a bishop, a great teacher of the faith and a great saint.

Teach, us dear Lord, by day and by night to trust unwaveringly in you. Teach the true meaning of the fact that with you everything is possible.

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