

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Feb 3rd 2015

Faith and the Life-giving Power of God in Christ

Chapter four of Mark's gospel narrates four remarkable episodes which, one right after the other, manifest the Lord's power to give life: His power over chaotic nature (He calms a life-threatening storm), destructive demons (He casts out a legion of evil spirits from the Gerasene demoniac, giving back to him a normal life of sanity), debilitating illness (He stops the twelve year flow of blood in the woman who touched the hem of His garment, removing the threat to her life and restoring her capacity to bring new life to the world in childbirth), and death itself (He restores life to Jairus's 12 year-old daughter who had died earlier in the day).

Today's gospel narrates the last two stories, which Mark weaves together into one. Jesuit scripture scholar Daniel Harrington notes that both deal with women in life-and-death situations, both women are called "daughter," and both need salvation or rescue from their situation. Onlookers in both stories are skeptical of Jesus's power, but they are dumbfounded when, before their eyes, that power is unleashed: the woman is healed, and the dead child is once again alive.

In both narratives faith is the key to triggering and focusing the Lord's miraculous power. In both cases, faith (the faith of the debilitated woman, and the faith of Jairus, the desperate father of the dead child) is the channel through which the Lord goes to work restoring life.

In both stories, then, the life-giving power of God – in Christ, through Him, and in Him – breaks into and works through the particular realities and felt experiences of human life – especially life compromised and even lost. Both reveal that the God of Jesus Christ is the God of the living – not the dead. They reveal that the living God is life giving, manifested in Jesus who responds to those who approach Him with faith – like the woman pleading to be healed, like the father who begs for the life of his daughter, and like us when we must deal with pain, suffering and death.

Both stories also anticipate the Lord's resurrection, when on account of His passion and death, He is raised by the Father and thereby reveals that when life confronts death, it overcomes it. Surpasses it. Conquers it. In contemplating the resurrection we can encounter the very fullness of life: the risen Christ – who abides with us now to bring us to eternal life and, in the meantime, to give holy meaning to pain, suffering, and death when we encounter them in faith along the path of our lives on this earth.