

Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24

Psalms 30

2 Corinthians 8:7,9,13-15

Mark 5:21-43

Homilist: Deacon Mike Mocek

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A few months ago, New York Times columnist David Brooks wrote, "It seems that the smarter we get about technology the dumber we get about relationships." I had never heard it put quite that way, but the more I think about it, the more I agree. Certainly, the "Twitter wars" that seem to break out at least hourly these days support that conclusion. But Mr. Brooks' column was not so much about technology, or even relationships, as it was about the power of touch. He wrote, "The power of loving touch is astounding; the power of invasive touch is horrific." He cited a well-known 1940's era study of an Austrian orphanage that took extra care to make sure its infants were not infected with disease. The children received first-class nutrition and medical care, but to minimize contact with germs, they were rarely touched. Thirty-seven percent of these babies died before reaching the age of 2. In his column, Brooks also addressed the tragic consequences of invasive touch – sexual abuse and other violent physical attacks on children that leave deep, life-long emotional scars. His conclusion? We must take the power of touch very seriously. The effects can be overwhelming – overwhelmingly good as well as overwhelmingly bad.

Today's Gospel is one of the most profound testaments to the power of touch of all time. It begins with a synagogue official pleading with Jesus to simply lay his hands on his daughter so she might get well and live. As they departed for the official's house, a large crowd followed and pressed upon Jesus. We can easily imagine the pushing, shoving, and elbowing that must have taken place as people in the crowd maneuvered to get closer to Jesus. A long-suffering woman worked her way through this crowd, came up behind Jesus, and touched his

cloak. She was healed of her affliction immediately. Despite the distracting press of the crowd, and to the amazement of his disciples, Jesus felt the woman's touch as well as his healing grace as it was conveyed to the woman. Later, in the synagogue official's house, Jesus took the hand of the child who was, by that time, thought to be dead. She rose immediately and walked around. When the suffering woman was healed, Jesus told her, "your faith has saved you." And when others reported to the synagogue official that his daughter had died, Jesus said, "Do not be afraid, just have faith." Both the woman and the little girl were healed by faith and through touch.

In our second reading today, we heard Saint Paul encouraging the people of Corinth to reach out and touch others in a slightly different manner – through unity in Jesus Christ. Paul is collecting money for suffering Christians in Jerusalem. In his appeal, Paul reminds the Corinthians of their many blessings, and he calls on them to be generous to others just as Jesus was generous to them. Paul describes this as a matter not only of faith and generosity, but also of fairness and equity. Paul is not simply asking the people of Corinth for money. He is asking them to act as one people in Christ. He is calling them to the Christian principle of solidarity – another form of touch.

In our lives today, we continue to be called to solidarity with others, especially the poor and the suffering. We touch others in solidarity through our generosity and our actions. Examples and opportunities are all around us. Members of our Saint Vincent de Paul society touch others through home visits with their clients. Many from this parish touch others through volunteer activities and generous donations to Catholic Charities and WestAid. Some touch the poor by serving and sharing weekly Agape Meals at Broadway Baptist Church. In a couple weeks we will have the opportunity to touch ten homeless men through Room in the Inn as we host them for an

overnight stay in our Family Life Center. And today, we can all help Pope Francis touch the poor and suffering around the world through our donations to the annual Peter's Pence collection.

Just as Saint Paul's appeal to the people of Corinth was not just about money, our call to touch the poor and the suffering of our world today is much more than simply throwing money at a problem. It involves solidarity – becoming one in Christ with them, understanding them, and coming to the realization that we all have a lot in common. Pope Francis is known for solidarity, as is another Jesuit who lives and works in a gang-riddled area of Los Angeles. Fr. Greg Boyle founded Homeboy Industries, the largest gang intervention program in the world. When asked what made him different from violent gang members, Fr. Boyle cites three great fortunes of his upbringing: (1) it was almost completely devoid of despair – he always had hope; (2) there was no brutal trauma that led him to a state of rage; and (3) he was never plagued by mental illness. In the vernacular of the street, Fr. Boyle calls it sheer, dumb luck. We might also say, "There, but for the grace of God, go I."