

[Readings: Wis. 1:13-15; 2:23-24; Psalm 30; 2 Cor. 8:7, 9, 13-15; Mark 5:21-43]

Most people will go to any lengths to avoid talking about or thinking about death. We fear and dread it, and when it comes for us or for those close to us, we are angry and even more fearful. People spend billions of dollars avoiding it, delaying its effects, or trying to remain perpetually young. But as the old expression goes: the mortality rate in life is 100%. What does God say about death? Our First Reading says “God did not make death” – an odd statement, given that all things must die. God says through the inspired author of the Book of Wisdom that all creation is good. That God takes no delight in death and destruction, and that these are never God’s intentions.

So... If God made everything good, why doesn’t God just “fix” everything? The “death” spoken of here is the unnatural and avoidable kind: war, violence, starvation, disease and injustice. This “envy of the devil” is coupled with human actions rather than the reaction of a vengeful God. It’s not up to GOD to make things right -- you and I are the ones to make things right. It’s up to us to “fix” things that can be avoided or reconciled.

When we fail to bring peace, fellowship, nourishment, health and justice, it is unfair to get angry with and to blame God. Natural biological death is not a punishment but an essential element of creation. And death, when it is understood as separation from God, is met with God’s response: the gift of eternal life. Jesus Christ, Who died an unnatural and violent death, is the promise of a new life, an eternal life without sorrow or pain.

The power of God to do this is limited only by our own attitude. Faith makes healing possible. In almost all of the Gospel healings, Jesus declares that it is the faith of the individual that makes the healing possible. It seems that God can exert a positive, active healing power on our behalf, but it must be met by an open and receptive power that only we possess. God intends for us to have life and to have it abundantly. God does not afflict us with death and disease as some sort of punishment or test. Life will deal out many painful situations, but only you and I can decide how we will respond to them.

This Tuesday is my sister Kathy’s first birthday since her passing in November. I remember all the prayers that you and I offered for her healing and cure from cancer. I had problems with faith and prayer when that didn’t happen. Until I realized that I was praying for what I wanted, not what God had planned.

When it was close to the end of her life on earth, I asked if she was ready for her transition. She said, "Yes. And it will be quick and peaceful." And it was.

With whom do you most identify in today's Gospel? There are plenty of characters here who are being stung by death. There is a woman whose whole life has been caught and dominated by a terrible, life-demanding illness. There is a distraught father. A little girl whose young life is being cut short. There are the baffled disciples, the crowd who doesn't know what to think of all this. Where are you? And yet, intruding into the story is another face, the strong, life-giving face of Jesus. Mark says that Jesus was forever intruding into fixed, settled, hopeless situations and bringing life. Hear His strong voice speaking over the laments and dirges in today's Gospel. Hear Him as he calls to the little girl, "Get up!"

I think He may be calling to you and me. "Get up!" His voice is strong, commanding, and vital. "Get up!" You have perhaps heard His comforting, soft voice before, stilling the waves of the storm, bringing peace to troubled waters. Now hear His other voice, that strong, shattering, enlivening voice. Evoking "fear and trembling" (verse 33) in all who heard it that day, it may do the same for us. Life is frightening, when it intrudes into the realm of death. Hear his voice now. I think He is shouting. There is so much death. We are asleep with death so it takes a loud voice to wake us.

Negativity, fear and doubt have to give way to faith, trust and hope. We who have much of this do not need more. But perhaps our call today is to be a positive witness to those who have less. To "pay" it forward, or better still, to "pray" it forward! St. Paul is not calling us to some socialistic commune in today's Second Reading. He is asking us to meet everyone's needs equally.

Death is chaotic. Jesus Christ has come into the world to deal with the chaos of death. Jairus rejoices; the old woman tells the whole truth.

What is the whole truth? Surely, the Way, the Truth and the Life could order her chaos. In this fallen world, in this world suffering from sin and death, there's plenty of chaos. Jesus came into the world to deal with death and chaos.

And we Christians are meant to share this fact with the world. We are to go to the ends of the world, as joyful, missionary disciples, announcing the Good News that chaos will not win.

Against all odds, all our evidence, God will order the chaos. AMEN!