

Recently, as I drove down 30th St., I passed the driveway of North Grand Mall closest its intersection with Grand Avenue. Standing by the driveway was a woman holding a hand-lettered cardboard sign stating: “NEED HELP.” I found myself asking: “What is her story? What has brought her to this point in her life? She is a contemporary Jairus, the synagogue official, and the unnamed woman in today’s gospel.

Both Jairus and the woman are at the point of despair. Jairus’ twelve-year-old daughter is dying. Having been with parents in similar situations, Jairus is grasping for a last-minute miracle-cure that will rescue his child from the grasp of death. The woman has suffered her affliction for twelve years, exhausting her financial resources on medical treatments (not unlike numbers of people today) with the result that not only is she still ill, she is also financially bankrupt. Jairus and the woman have heard about Jesus and his healing work, and both in their desperation approach him—Jairus going so far as to demean himself publicly physically “falling to his feet and pleading earnestly” with Jesus; the woman (culturally not permitted to publicly approach, much less, speak to a man) drawing close enough to reach out her hand and “touch his cloths”. By their actions, Jairus and the woman are models of faith. Both approach Jesus with complete trust.

Jesus responds to their faith by gifting each of them with the gift of healing resulting in new life. Jesus is not deterred (even when told that Jairus’ daughter has died) by the ridicule and lack of faith of the townspeople, or the press of the crowd surrounding the woman. As the reading from the book of Wisdom proclaims today, “God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living.” The raising of Jairus’ daughter from the dead and the healing the woman, are signs, fulfilling the author of Wisdom’s prophecy in Jesus who as God comes is revealed in human flesh and blood. Through personal faith in Jesus, illness and death, as well as any other force that cuts people off from God is vanquished and life, fullness of life, eternal life, is given. What Jesus did for Jairus and the woman, Jesus has come and still comes to do today, all that is necessary is that one put complete trust in him; open themselves and enter into relationship with him.

In reaching out to Jairus, and the woman, Jesus does not pass judgment on the personal life or life situation of either. Jesus does not ask if they are worthy of his gift. (Who is?) Nor does Jesus ration his gift. He gives totally, completely. In allowing himself to be touched by the woman who because of her illness, in Jewish religious law was considered “impure” and by his physically touching the body of a deceased person, thus rendering himself ritually impure, Jesus demonstrates and proclaims that nothing—no illness, no sin, nothing stands in the way of his exercising divine compassion and mercy. Through his words and deeds, Jesus, the Steward of God, exercises generous, whole-hearted giving, as St. Paul proclaims: “Jesus, though he was rich, for your sake became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.” This is the God whom Jesus has come to reveal.

As disciples of Jesus we are invited, in our turn, to imitate his same divine generosity, with the same type of stewardship demonstrated by Jesus, living lives marked by compassion and mercy. While there are many examples I could cite, I choose one that has, and will continue, to stir much discussion and debate.

As all of us are aware, the Supreme Court will soon rule on the issue of so-called “Gay Marriage” in our country. Whatever that decision, when it comes to persons with same-sex attraction, in my family, our parish, our community, what is does my personal response, our collective response as a parish in terms of attitude and action look like? While holding to the Church’s traditional teaching on the Sacrament of Marriage based on natural law, the testimony of the Scriptures and Church Tradition, the working document for this coming Fall’s Synod on the Family at the Vatican states: “independent of their sexual tendency” persons of same sex attraction are to be “respected in their dignity and welcomed with sensibility and delicateness, whether in the church or society.” How is, or will, each of us put such a directive into practice? Are we willing to risk the mercy and compassion shown by Jesus? Do we deal death or bestow life? Jairus, the unnamed woman in the gospel in their many guises, and ultimately, Jesus, himself, await our response.