

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME — B

READING I Wis 1:13-15; 2:23-24

READING II 2 Cor 8:7, 9, 13-15

GOSPEL Mk 5:21-43

The book of Wisdom is about coping. The author exhorts his fellow Jews in Egypt in the first century B.C. to be loyal. He develops this notion of loyalty by using life/death imagery. Death is not merely physical. It implies loss of intimacy with God, exclusion from his circle of friends. The author articulates Gn 3 in a fresh sense. All who join the devil's (formerly the snake's) party experience this type of death. Life, on the other hand is about being on good terms with God: Enjoying a unique relationship with him. Incorruption is God's gift which enables a person to have such a relationship.

In 15:3 the author teaches that to recognize God's sovereignty is to possess the very principle of immortality. This is the justice by which one submits to God. It implies accepting God's outlook on reality along with his world of values. It is the Garden Revisited: The undoing of what transpired in Gn 3.

In this section of Second Corinthians, Paul appeals to the Corinthians to contribute to the collection for the Church in Jerusalem. He begins by noting their own spiritual resources, which should prompt them to give. His motive is bedrock Christianity, namely, the self-giving of Jesus. At the moment of the incarnation, Jesus divests himself of divine riches so that humanity may share in the gift of salvation. For Paul, giving is always an enriching experience. He also formulates a principle of equality. Those with more should help those with less so that, later, those thus enriched can reciprocate. Finally, Paul cites Ex 16:18 as an example: The manna in the desert. God did not allow the Israelites to have too much or too little. So, the Corinthians should not tolerate the inequality existing between the Jerusalem Church and themselves.

The two stories in Mark (the daughter of Jairus [vv. 21-24, 35-43] and the woman with a hemorrhage vv. 25-34) were once independent compositions. However, Mark brought them together to show Jesus' lordship, and to have the stories comment on each other. In both cases Jesus helps females who are in difficult situations (the hemorrhage, the sickness which leads to death). In both cases, the number twelve is prominent: The time of the woman's illness, the age of the little girl. The action of Jesus is to bestow wholeness and life. He welcomes the woman ("daughter") as a member of that group which accepts Jesus. He raises the little girl and restores a future to a discouraged father. As a result, Jesus appears as a miracle worker who, by God's power, sustains a fragile, distraught world. Mark prepares for this moment in a unique way: Primarily, at the resurrection. Only the self-giving of Jesus will make that moment possible.

Mark uses both stories to teach. Jairus' request ("that she may get well and live") would be understood by his audience in terms of salvation and eternal life. "She had heard about Jesus" (v. 27) is often linked with the proclamation of Jesus after Easter (Lk 24:19, 27 and Acts 18:25). By referring to faith in both stories (vv. 34,36), Mark establishes the bond between healing and association with Jesus. For Mark and his readers, Jesus is already communicating the power of the resurrection experience.

To give is to live. We prefer to amass our wealth so that we can finally enjoy life. We prefer to limit our time and generosity towards others so that we can get on with real living. We prefer not to notice the pain of others so that our living will be unimpaired. We fail to realize that we truly celebrate living when we give, especially when we give ourselves. To give is to live.

In Second Corinthians, Paul offers the poverty of Jesus as motive for the community's generosity. At the moment of the incarnation, Jesus surrenders his divine riches. He truly becomes poor by experiencing the human condition, particularly as it culminates in the cross. The outcome, however, is that humanity can be enriched. By giving himself in death Jesus gives humanity the chance to live. Jesus is in touch with real living because he is in touch with real giving: That is, of himself. To give is to live.

Mark presents a picture of a Jesus who is opposed to everything which oppresses and depresses the human spirit. For Mark, Jesus is mediating the life of the resurrection by healing the woman and raising Jairus' daughter. As a result, humanity is made whole again. It is only this self-giving which gives meaning to Mark's view of Jesus. The Lord is alive in the resurrection because of his self-giving. For Mark, to give is to live.

Husbands and wives who give themselves to each other by ongoing concern know the art of living. Those who generously offer their time and their persons to the lonely and discouraged know how to live. The sick and the dying who persist in communicating joy amid pain know the secret of life. Workers, both married and single, who determine their success in terms of service rendered rather than dollars gained know great happiness and the joy of life. All such people measure life in terms of dedication. They maintain that to give is to live.

Eucharist captures the dimensions of living and giving. The setting is that of a meal where the ordinary staples of bread and wine are used. This action reflects the story of the night Jesus was given up. In Eucharist, that night is relived because by giving himself in death, Jesus was capable of a new form of life. Eucharist urges the community to adopt this manner of dying/living. Eucharist, too, insists that to give is to live.