

**June 27, 2021 Social Distancing Homily:** For more than a year we Americans were instructed by our public health officials and elected leaders to practice social distancing. Having physical contact was strongly discouraged out of fear that the Corona virus, a life threatening disease, might be contracted. One health care official, Doctor Anthony Fauci, warned us to avoid shaking hands with our neighbors. The subliminal fear of death haunted us as the pandemic raged on until very recently.

A relevant story:

Over twenty-five years ago, I served as chaplain at Saint Peter's Hospital in Albany. Late one night I received an urgent phone call from an on-duty nurse on one of the floors. She asked me to return to the hospital and anoint a woman who was in the last stage of her terminal illness. I made it to the hospital in the nick of time. The young woman, skeletal in appearance, was having some difficulty breathing. Heartbroken, I surprised myself by bending over and kissing her on the forehead. Soon after, she died. As I was leaving the room, a nurse whispered in my ear, "Father, you just kissed an A.I.D.S. patient". I was horrified. I was fearful that I may have contracted a deadly disease. I was panic stricken. Two days later, I spoke with an infectious disease doctor, who assured me that I need not fear... that I was safe.

The gospel presents to us two miraculous cures which Jesus worked for two women: the twelve year old daughter of a prominent Jew, a synagogue official, and a woman suffering with a hemorrhage... a flow of blood... for twelve years.

In Mark's account touching a person in need is accentuated. Jesus did not practice social distancing. In his day there was no mention of germs, vaccines or infectious diseases. Jairus, the synagogue official, begged Jesus to lay His hands on his daughter, who was close to death.

"Come, lay your hands upon my daughter that she may live." (Mk. 5:21)

Sometime later Jesus, now with the girl who had moments earlier died, took the child by the hand. He ignored the social conventions of his day and appeared to bypass the Law of Moses.

In the Book of Numbers, it is stipulated that "whoever touches a dead body of any human being shall be unclean for seven days" (Num 19:11) and "When a man dies in a tent, everyone who enters the tent as well as everybody already in it, shall be unclean for seven days". (Num 19:14)

A woman, who seemingly had lost hope and had lived in isolation, touches the hem of the garment of Jesus. In doing so, the one excluded from worship because of her disease, contaminates him. Jesus does not scold her. Her touch does not render Jesus impure but instead cures the woman, whom he singles out for praise because of her faith in him!

Some important lessons may be derived from today's gospel:

First, illness and death, often catching us unawares are almost always disruptive. Clearly, we are not in control of our Lives. Only God is in control. This is a hard lesson to learn and can be difficult for many people to accept;

Second, the raising of the daughter of Jairus anticipates the resurrection of Jesus and our own resurrection as well. The word addressed by Jesus to the girl, “arise” (Mk. 5:41), is the very word used by the Evangelist to proclaim his resurrection from the dead (Mk. 16:6) and;

Third, even now, Jesus allows himself to be touched by us, especially in the Eucharist, we touch not merely the hem of his garment, but his very self!

How do we approach Jesus in a time of anxiety? The answer is in today’s gospel, we fall on our knees!

“Seeing him (Jesus), he fell at His feet and pleaded earnestly with him.” (Mk. 5:22)

Such a humble posture is likely to please the One who bowed down to humanity and was lifted high on a cross.

Amen!