



Thoughts on the Journey

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There is a small plaque that hangs on my kitchen wall that reads: **WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU MORE THAN YOU CAN STAND, KNEEL!** It's a nice little reminder that regardless of how much life hands you, take it to the Lord who knows all things, sees all things, and heals all things. I have to admit, that as good as it sounds on paper, it's hard to surrender the challenges and worries that plague us in our lifetime. The simple struggles are easy to release to God, but it's true that many of the things we grapple with are hard to bring to the light. Instead, we take them underground, especially things that have a stigma associated with them.

On the street where I grew up, was the Anderson family who lived several houses down from us. There was a mother, father, 3 boys, one daughter and a dog named Tippy. The boys were very athletic, the father worked very hard, the daughter was a typical little girl who was very shy and very sweet, but the mother was rarely seen outside of the house. One day while playing with other kids in the neighborhood, I saw the mother at the corner of our street shining the stop sign with a stuffed animal. She had on an apron and was talking to herself rather loudly. Within minutes, the father and two sons took her by the hands and escorted her home.

Not knowing what to think about what I witnessed, I went home and asked my mom what was wrong with Mrs. Anderson. She explained that she had several "nervous breakdowns" and that she didn't always think clearly. She followed it with a warning that *it's something we don't talk about*. I didn't understand what I saw and I didn't understand my mother's response.

In Mark's gospel this week, Jesus was once again being followed by crowds of people. Jairus, one of the rulers of the synagogue, approached Jesus in earnest and implored Him to come quickly to heal his daughter who was at the point of death. Jesus agreed. As He made His way through the large crowd, a woman who had suffered with

hemorrhaging for years, touched His garment in the hopes of being healed. Jesus felt the power go out of Him, and stopped and asked who touched His clothes? The woman realizing she had been healed,

"... fell down before Jesus and told him the whole truth. He said to her, Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be cured of your affliction."

Jesus then went to the home of Jairus to heal his dying daughter. There were two significant healings that day, both requiring faith in Jesus. One healing was for a person with status, the other was for a person who lived with the stigma of being ritually unclean, who had nothing, and who was alone in her suffering.

There is an increasing number of people who suffer from mental illness, addictions, anxieties, and other ailments that have a stigma connected to them. As a result, many of these people are fearful of others knowing and hide the reality of their suffering; they go underground. Like my neighbor, Mrs. Anderson, and the woman in the gospel, they are fearful that perhaps even Jesus would treat them as a social outcast? Not the case! The woman stood in front of Jesus, confessed everything to Him trusting that Jesus would heal her. Regardless of whether we're suffering in body, mind, or spirit, bringing the light of truth to Jesus is essential to healing. That's one of the benefits of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

It is also crucial that we examine our attitudes and think differently about stigmatized suffering, especially with regards to mental illness. As imitators of Christ's compassion and mercy, we will help others heal when we ourselves remain open and understand that many of these challenges are chemical imbalances and are as real as any other illness. When they are ignored they lead to bigger problems. Like the woman in Mark's gospel, it takes courage to come forward and deal with the truth of who we are and what weighs down our bodies, minds, and hearts.