

HOMILY SUNDAY 13 – B  
“The Healing Power of Love”  
(Wis 1:13-15, 2:23-24; 2 Cor 8:7, 9, 13-15; Mark 5:21-43)

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A man took out a \$5 million insurance policy, drove his car off the road into a tree and claimed he was paralysed shoulders down. The insurance agents visited him and tried to get some physical response out of him, but he never moved a muscle. Finally one told him that they had to pay him out since they couldn't disprove it, but what would he be able to do with it anyway, since he was paralysed? The man responded he would ask a relative to put him on a stretcher, take him to Lourdes, and then they would see the biggest miracle they had ever seen.

Have you ever seen the movie “Elephant Man?” That movie is a vignette of the gospel story we heard today, and carries a powerful message.

#### Believe in the Healing Power of Love and Loving Touch

Mrs. Kendall, a famous British actress, starred in the movie “Elephant Man.” The Elephant Man was a horribly disfigured and ugly man in England years ago who had become a circus sideshow. She went to see him, and presented her hand. He put out his less deformed, left hand. Without saying a word, she gently refused to shake that hand, but rather waited for his other hand, the one people usually use for greeting others. Finally, after some long minutes while he comprehended what was happening, he brought out his maimed hand, and they shook hands. It was the first time he had ever held a woman's hand, and that was the beginning of his personal transformation. Healing happened for him, through that touch of healing acceptance.

In the gospel today, there are two requests for healing, one verbal and one non-verbal, both involving the interplay of faith, fear, words and touch. The synagogue leader, Jairus, is told to not be afraid, only believe in who Jesus is. His daughter is taken by the hand and brought back to life. The woman with the haemorrhage feels fear of being found out, but her faith overcomes her fear. She touches Jesus' clothes and is healed.

I believe that it is faith in the love of Jesus expressed through personal attention, touch and word that healed people, and not a magical power. He shares that same power with all of us. We simply have to believe in it more deeply and practice it more fully. We need to overcome our own fear of loving and being loved, and reach out more boldly to answer especially the emotional needs of others.

Mother Theresa, who picked up the dying in India and attended to their needs, has often stated that the greatest need in North America is not physical, but personal – it is simply the need to be loved, valued, and accepted. People are starving for affection and love.

Fr. John Fuellenbach, a noted retreat preacher, worked with Mr. Theresa in Calcutta as a worker, not as a priest or chaplain, for a short while. He struggled to have a positive

attitude with the destitute, the very people he was trying to help and who were often smelly, sometimes offensive and even at times abusive. One day, he was rolling bandages in a corner of a hospice ward, and noticed a sister washing a girl covered with sores all over. The sister was struggling, however, as the girl was outrageous, kicking and screaming. Thinking of his own experience he wondered to himself, "Aha, how long will she hold out." Then Mr. Theresa herself came in. He thought, "Good, now we will see what she would do." She assessed the situation quickly, sent the sister away and took over herself. The kid was as outrageous as before. "Good," he thought, "this will be a real test." Mother Theresa dropped the sponge, held the child in her arms, looked into her eyes with penetrating love for a long time, then hugged her and rocked her for over five minutes. Then she stopped, got the sponge and washed her, and the kid did not move. Amazing – he thought – this truly is compassion in action, the power of love. He realized that this was the first time he thought she truly was a saint, and a tough cookie.

Perhaps we have all experienced the power of a love, especially through touch. I remember sharing my feelings and personal situation at a deep level for the first time with the AA group in Beauval and the fear I had of being rejected. After I finished speaking and just stood there feeling vulnerable, someone came over and shook my hand, and someone else brought me a cup of coffee. That feeling of belonging and acceptance that I felt was powerful. I had loved them by trusting them, and they had loved me by accepting me as I was, sealed by a handshake and a cup of coffee. That was the beginning of my 12 Step healing journey that continues to this day.

Touch is powerful. Many of life's deepest wounds come from being touched inappropriately, as in sexual abuse, or being abused verbally. On the other hand, much of life's deepest healing comes to us through appropriate, loving touch, and the language of blessing, of affirmation.

I remember a teenager at La Plonge High School who actually cried when he participated in an Affirmation Brainstorm. He had never heard so many positive statements about himself in his lifetime, and it was almost too much. We need to believe in the healing power of love expressed through words and through touch.

Just recently the wisdom of an 85 year old man came to me. As he put it, "I've learned that every day you should reach out and touch someone. People love that human touch - holding hands, a warm hug, or just a friendly pat on the back."

The Eucharist we celebrate today, in the words of Ron Rolheiser, is God hugging us, sharing himself intimately with us, first through the Liturgy of the Word, and then through touch, as we receive his Body and Blood.

May our celebration today, help us to believe in the Healing Power of Love, and to express that love, like Jesus, in appropriate ways that heal, through word and through touch.