

## 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

2006

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

Ps 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11, 12, 13

II Cor 8:7, 9, 13-15

Mk 5:21-43 or 5:21-24, 35b-43

“Do Not Be Afraid”

Joseph L. Narog, O.S.A.

One of the great rites of passage in my family, when we were growing up, was to ride the big roller coaster at the local amusement park. My brother, who's 11 years older than I, used to egg on our cousin Mary and myself – telling us how the cars creaked up the steep hill, how they whipped around the hairpin turns. I can still remember standing in line for the first time with Mary, our hearts pounding in our throats, and screaming at the top of our lungs when we finally got on the ride. There's no other way to describe it – we were scared out of our wits!

But who here hasn't been fearful? Who hasn't been afraid? There's any number of phobias.

The fear of heights is acrophobia. Hopefully none of us suffer from ecclesiophobia – that is the fear of church. Franklin Roosevelt warned of phobophobia – the fear of fear itself. And there's even something called arachibutyrophobia. Do you know what that is? – Fear of peanut butter sticking to the roof of the mouth.

In our lives, fear certainly can be much more serious than peanut butter or roller coasters. And

doesn't it seem that there's so much to be afraid of in our world? Why, we even have to remove our shoes at airports now to pass through security checkpoints. Potential terrorist threats and reports of new health concerns often fill our evening news. And what are the fears that we bring with us to this Eucharist? Perhaps we're afraid of being alone or facing an undecided future. Or our hearts are heavy because we worry about losing someone we love – a spouse who's caught up in an addiction or a parent who lies struggling in a hospital bed. The synagogue official in today's Gospel could relate – he feared losing his 12 year old daughter. Who among us wouldn't share that fear?

And yet, in the midst of Jairus' fear – in the midst of our real and serious fears – Jesus declares,

“Do not be afraid; just have faith.” How does Christ dare say, “Do not be afraid?” Because he took on those fears, he faced our greatest fear – death – and overcame it. Jesus the Christ proves that, in the end, there's truly something stronger than all our fears, stronger than death. Jesus brought Jairus' little girl back to life, out of love, foreshadowing God's immense love for all of us in Jesus the Christ's own resurrection from the dead.

Death is not the way it was supposed to be. As the reading from the Book of Wisdom indicates,

“God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living...for God formed us to be imperishable.” Jesus himself was perturbed and wept in the face of death, as we're told in the story of his friend Lazarus' passing. God's love, made manifest in Christ, is stronger than “the envy of the devil,” by which “death entered the world.” God's love is greater than human sin and evil, than any of our fears.

If we look honestly and closely at our own lives, at our own experiences, we can see Christ

reaching out to us in our fears, taking us by the hand and boldly proclaiming, “I say to you, arise!” “Do not be afraid; just have faith.” ‘Arise from your fears.’ But how is this so? –

As often happens, through others. Through those God has given us in our lives. Whose hands, whose voices have been those of Christ to us? The daughter who supports her father in

dealing with an addiction, who encourages him by remembering the anniversary of his not drinking. – And we hear Christ say, “Do not be afraid.” The mother, who in her dying

breaths, manages to utter those three powerful words, “I love you,” to her husband and children. – And we hear Christ say, “Do not be afraid.” The friend who goes out of the way to

call and check in when we’re ill or feeling down, depressed. – And we hear Christ say, “Do not be afraid; just have faith.”

In describing Rembrandt’s famous painting, “The Return of the Prodigal Son,” the Dutch priest

and spiritual writer, Henri Nouwen, notes how he was drawn to the father’s hands. He says, “But gradually over the years I have come to know those hands. They have held me from

the moment of my conception, they welcomed me at my birth, held me close to my mother’s breast, fed me, and kept me warm. They protected me in times of danger and consoled

me in times of grief. They have waved me goodbye and always welcomed me back.

Those hands are God’s hands. They also are the hands of my parents, teachers, friends, healers,

and all those whom God has given me to remind me how safely I am held.”

We are to be Christ's hands and Christ's voice in our world. The only wise fear, according to Augustine, is the fear of rejecting this responsibility, of turning away from the love of God and neighbor. In the midst of real fears and struggles, we're called to reach out to one another, 'giving from our abundance,' supplying hope and courage. Let us resolve to take some time this week to consider who may need to hear the gentle voice of Jesus or to feel his healing touch. And may we then join with him in exclaiming, "Do not be afraid; just have faith" – 'arise, for we are safely held.'