

Today's Gospel reading tells a story of remarkable faith. Jairus, a devout and holy man, a leader in his synagogue, came home one day to find his daughter on the verge of death. The child was twelve. When Jairus heard that Jesus was in the vicinity of his village, he went immediately to him and asked Jesus to heal his daughter. Now, you just heard the story in the Gospel, so there is no need for me to tell it in detail again, but what I want to do is look at it as a remarkable demonstration of faith.

In the story, Jesus arrived at Jairus' house to find that the girl was already dead. Neighbors told him not to bother Jesus further, but Jesus interceded in their plea and told them that the child was not dead, but rather sleeping. What do we have here? Some would take our Lord's response literally and claim that the girl was, in fact, sleeping or perhaps in a coma, but that is not what Mark meant to tell his readers. In writing this, Mark was writing from the perspective of the Resurrection, a perspective holding that our Lord's resurrection overcomes the sting of death for all of us. From a historical perspective, the crowd was right. The girl was dead. This is a major point in this story. Jesus brought this child to life, from death.

In telling this story, Mark wanted his readers to learn two things. Faith does move mountains: all things are possible when we turn to Jesus in faith. Mark's second point was that Jesus the Christ is not only the lord of life. He is also the lord over death. To have faith in Christ is to accept him as the lord of life who is also the lord over death. In Christ, all things are possible. Saint Paul was right on - nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ, not even death.

The story is, as always, interesting in the details, but the details are not essential. Yet, Mark gives us details, here even the Aramaic *talitha cumi*, or "little girl, get up." The Lord then told her parents to feed her. This level of detail is most unusual for Mark, who was a "get to the point" type of evangelist. But these details help us to feel present in the story so that Mark can, through the story, help us know the tangible and present love of God for humanity. Mark wants us to understand that this love comes to us through faith. Saint Paul took this theme of love experienced through faith and developed it in his letters. Martin Luther grabbed this ball and really ran with it, teaching us that grace is God's active love, through Christ, and that it is by grace, through faith, that we are redeemed. It is by grace, through faith, that we find our eternal life in Christ.

What is this faith, which is so powerful that even death can not end it? I believe most of us understand that we gain faith through the experience of Christ, but in today's story there is nothing to indicate that Jairus had any previous experience of Jesus. Yet, his faith was as strong as any that we have encountered. What we can say about Jairus' faith is that it was built on assumptions, assumptions from what he heard about Jesus and what he possibly had seen. Based on these assumptions, Jairus decided to turn to Jesus.

Now, this tells us something. It tells us that faith, even though strengthened by experiences of the grace of God through Jesus Christ, derives ultimately from assumptions, not proofs. The faithful person, first and foremost, assumes that there is a God. The faithful person comes to accept, without question, that there is a God and that God both cares for and is involved with his creation. The faithful person further assumes that God is humanity's lover and is not capricious. In other words, the faithful person assumes that God can and will hear the pleas of his people and will never ignore those pleas. The faithful person assumes that Jesus is the perfect expression of God's holy love, and that those who have joined the family of God, in Christ, through baptism into the Lord's death and resurrection, are special to God. Therefore God will reach out to those who call upon him in their need. The faithful person just assumes that God is in charge of the world and anything that expresses his love is possible.

The opening verse of Psalm 16 gives an excellent summary of this thing called faith. "Protect me, O God, for I take refuge in you." The faithful take refuge in God and their hope is not disappointed. *Amen.*