

## Readings and Commentary: Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

Summary by Maria Pitt: We have all heard people say, especially in the event of an untimely or unexpected death, that death must have been God's will. To this common theology, today's readings proclaim a resounding "no."

In the first reading from Wisdom, two important claims are made. First, God created life, and death was not part of the created order. Secondly, death comes into the world as a result of the fall, "by the envy of the devil." Our God is a God of life, since "God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living."

The two stories in Mark develop these ideas. In the first miracle, Jesus heals the woman afflicted with hemorrhages, and in the second, Jesus goes to the house of a synagogue official and brings the official's daughter back to life with the touch of his hand. In these Gospel narratives, Jesus affirms the teaching of Wisdom. God desires life, and in the presence of Jesus, death has been conquered and the created order restored.

Clearly, death is still with us, but Paul, in the second reading, offers hope that this situation is only temporary: "...[T]hough he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich." Jesus, by his willingness to suffer the pain of poverty and death, has opened the way to the restoration of God's created order. That order is not yet restored completely, but in the promise of Christ we know that death, even now, no longer has the final word.

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**First Reading** Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24

*By the envy of the devil, death entered the world.*

### **A reading from the Book of Wisdom**

God did not make death,  
nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living.  
For he fashioned all things that they might have being;  
and the creatures of the world are wholesome,  
and there is not a destructive drug among them  
nor any domain of the netherworld on earth,  
for justice is undying.  
For God formed man to be imperishable;  
the image of his own nature he made him.  
But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world,  
and they who belong to his company experience it.

### **The word of the Lord**

#### **Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24**

Commentary by Virginia Smith: The themes of the first reading and the Gospel are often intertwined, and that certainly is the case today. That theme, unfortunately, is one most wish to avoid at all costs...death. For Christians, however, death has as many positive connotations as negative. True, the life we live today will end, but at the moment it does, an entirely new life begins. For Christians, death is never the last word; life is as the reading from Wisdom implies.

The Book of Wisdom was composed by an anonymous Greek-speaking Jew sometime during the First Century BCE. Therefore, it provides the most fully developed theology of afterlife to be found in the First Testament. Wisdom 3:1-9 is frequently chosen as the first reading at Catholic funeral liturgies because of its lovely depiction of the author's notions of immortality. Obviously, that theology will later be fleshed out by Jesus himself.

The concept of life with God is beginning to emerge in Wisdom, having gradually developed over the long centuries of salvation history. Still, there is a reference today to the nether world which was simply the abode of the dead with no distinction between those who led godly lives and those who did not. Nonetheless, the thought that life once created is never destroyed appears in shadowy form here. More will be said about this in the commentary on the Gospel.

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## **Second Reading** 2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15

*Your abundance should supply the needs of the poor.*

### **A reading from the second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians**

Brothers and sisters:

As you excel in every respect, in faith, discourse, knowledge, all earnestness, and in the love we have for you,

may you excel in this gracious act also.

For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

Not that others should have relief while you are burdened, but that as a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their needs,

so that their abundance may also supply your needs, that there may be equality.

As it is written:

*Whoever had much did not have more,  
and whoever had little did not have less.*

## **The word of the Lord**

### **2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15**

Commentary by Virginia Smith: One of the themes of this letter is discipleship, and it provides the focus for today's reading. What does it mean to follow the risen Christ? It is a question central to Christian belief and one that is never satisfactorily answered completely. If we are serious about our baptismal commitment, our grasp of discipleship should broaden and deepen as the years pass.

Paul emphasizes the attribute of generosity for the disciples of Corinth. Christians should support one another. Here is found the nascent notion of the universal Church. Granted, it is extremely limited at this stage, but the seeds are being sown.

The idea of parishioners being responsible for their fellow Catholics, perhaps on the other side of the world, is one that constantly needs to be reinforced. Once, when this issue was being discussed at a conference, a woman active in her parish leaned over and remarked, "Where I live, the universal Church ends at the county line." And one parish that tithed its contributions was roundly criticized by some who said they gave to the parish, not to some unknown entity in the wider world.

Paul's words to the Corinthians are as timely today as they were when first he wrote them. While the Church should avoid being too centered on finances, there are other forms of generosity. Today, their time is the most generous gift many can give. Others are very capable of sharing their talents. Whatever form generosity takes, Paul is right; Christians do not live for themselves alone.

## **Gospel Mark 5:21-43**

*Little girl, I say to you, arise!*

### **A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark**

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat  
to the other side,  
a large crowd gathered around him, and he stayed close  
to the sea.

One of the synagogue officials, named Jairus, came forward.  
Seeing him he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with  
him, saying,

"My daughter is at the point of death.  
Please, come lay your hands on her  
that she may get well and live."

He went off with him,  
and a large crowd followed him and pressed upon him.

There was a woman afflicted with hemorrhages for twelve  
years.

She had suffered greatly at the hands of many doctors  
and had spent all that she had.

Yet she was not helped but only grew worse.

She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the  
crowd

and touched his cloak.

She said, "If I but touch his clothes, I shall be cured."

Immediately her flow of blood dried up.

She felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction.

Jesus, aware at once that power had gone out from him,  
turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who has touched  
my clothes?"

But his disciples said to Jesus,

"You see how the crowd is pressing upon you,  
and yet you ask, 'Who touched me?'"

And he looked around to see who had done it.  
The woman, realizing what had happened to her,  
approached in fear and trembling.  
She 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."

While he was still speaking,  
people from the synagogue official's house arrived and  
said,  
"Your daughter has died; why trouble the teacher any  
longer?"  
Disregarding the message that was reported,  
Jesus said to the synagogue official,  
"Do not be afraid; just have faith."  
He did not allow anyone to accompany him inside  
except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James.  
When they arrived at the house of the synagogue official,  
he caught sight of a commotion,  
people weeping and wailing loudly.  
So he went in and said to them,  
"Why this commotion and weeping?  
The child is not dead but asleep."  
And they ridiculed him.  
Then he put them all out.  
He took along the child's father and mother  
and those who were with him  
and entered the room where the child was.  
He took the child by the hand and said to her, "*Talitha  
kourai*,"  
which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise!"  
The girl, a child of twelve, arose immediately and walked  
around.  
At that they were utterly astounded.  
He gave strict orders that no one should know this  
and said that she should be given something to eat.

## **The Gospel of the Lord**

## **Mark 5:21-43**

Commentary by Virginia Smith: The widow's son, Lazarus, and the daughter of Jairus all experienced that which will come to all of us in time, death. For much of the world, in death we slam up against a wall we cannot tunnel under, climb over, or skirt in either direction. It is, quite simply, the end, the life/death continuum. For Christians, however, these episodes prefigure Jesus' own victory over death. Christians live in a life/death/LIFE continuum. As the first preface of the funeral Mass proclaims, "Life is changed, not ended."

It would be wrong, however, to equate resuscitation with resurrection. All of those whom Jesus restored to life would at some point die again. At that point, they would move on into God's eternal realm rather than returning to this earthly existence. Jesus, on the other hand, conquered death once and for all. The risen Christ who emerged from the tomb on that first Easter still lives, and he always will.

What, then, is the purpose of bringing individuals back to life if they only have to die again? It is to show Jesus' power to eradicate our every fear, the greatest of which is usually death.

In its own way, the woman afflicted with hemorrhages tells the same story. Doctors could not help her, and after twelve years, she may well have been close to death herself. Here, too, she is restored to life, a life she had probably all but forgotten.

So although the first reading and the Gospel both speak of death, they are in reality all about life. Death never has the last word; life always does.