13 Sunday, Ordinary Time, B

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Gospel reading shows two miracle stories. In one, Jesus restored to life a little girl who was twelve years of age. In the other, he healed an older woman who had been sick for twelve years. This means that the woman had become ill about the same time the child was born and had been sick ever since. If we were ranking these two miracles as to the degree of difficulty, it seems to me that it might be easier to raise a child from the dead than to correct a chronic condition in the life of an adult. When I say that, of course, I am being somewhat teasing, but not entirely; I speak of our spiritual condition and not our physical. That is how I want us to apply this story for a few moments – spiritually instead of physically, not the chronic condition of the body, but the chronic condition of the soul, because in this area of life, every one of us need some kind of healing experience.

Let's start by analyzing the problem. For twelve years this woman had lived with the limitations of her affliction, and I can see in that a close parallel to some of the spiritual problems that afflict our lives. A sickness of the soul, no less than a sickness of the body, can become a chronic condition. Look into your own life and tell me if this is not true.

Were you touchy and difficult to live twelve years ago? Look at that area of your life today. Has anything changed? Has the condition improved at all? Or look at another area – did you resent something that

someone did to you or said about you a long time ago? Are you still carrying that same old feeling of resentment today? If you are, that is a chronic sickness. What is so bad about this kind of thing is not that we have these problems, but that we are willing to tolerate them and justify them year after year. The poor woman in our story was the helpless victim of a physical sickness. Many of us, however, are the voluntary victims of spiritual laziness.

And here is another aspect of the problem – these chronic conditions, these things that we just let go, not only continue, but they tend to get worse. The reading tells us that the woman tried any available medical treatment, but this did not help. Instead of getting better, she had gotten worse. Once again, the spiritual parallel applies. Our attitudes toward life and our relationships with others do not stay in a static state. A grown man does not remain at the same level of childishness throughout his adult life. He either grows up, or else he regresses further and further into childishness. A selfish person does not stop and stay on the same level of self–seeking. He either discovers that there are other people around him, or else he becomes more and more self–centered. Bad habits bad habits are not like good wine; they do not get better with age. On the contrary, they get worse.

Now, let's move a step further and ask ourselves the logical question – Is there anything we can do about it?

A wonderful thing about the woman in our story was that she had not given up on herself. She was still trying. If help was available, she was determined to find it. She heard about Jesus and his healing power, so she made her way through the crowd and got close enough to be able to reach and touch his clothing. It may seem to us like superstition rather than faith, but that is what she had, and she acted upon it. That was the key to her recovery.

One thing that can always be said about faith is that it is not lazy; it is active. To believe in the saving power of Jesus does not mean that we sit down and wait for him to come and solve our problems and straighten out our lives. If the woman from our Gospel reading had taken that approach, it is safe to say she would not have been restored to health.

For a moment, let each one of us take a moment to look at his or her own life. Has our relationship with Jesus made any difference in our character? Is the inner man, the person we are, stronger and healthier than he was twelve years ago? If not, why not? In most cases, the answer to that question would be spiritual laziness. Christ is not going to change and strengthen our lives with some kind of magic. We become experts in the great art of Christian living in much the same way we become experts in anything. You learn the technique and then you practice it. That is how you master the game of golf. That is how you become a master pianist. That is how you move toward excellence in every kind of skillful performance. Being a Christian takes practice.

The point is that the only faith that works is the faith that we put to work. God is not going to do for us that we could do for ourselves. You would not do that to your children. Why should we think God would do that to us?

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

If we want to be Christian in the highest sense of the word we can, but it will not be easy. It will take some honest facing of facts. It will take the daily exercise of faith. And it will take time. But we are not incurable. Christ can heal our spiritual illness, even though we may have lived with it for twelve or more years. **Amen.**