

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Is there anything more maddening than being “put on hold”? They all do it: the cable company, the telephone company, the electric company, the hospitals, doctors’ offices, pharmacies, car repair shops, oops, sometimes even church offices. In the same vein, but perhaps even worse, is being sent to “voice mail”. Don’t you hate it?

I guess that’s why so many of you text these days. When you text it’s kind of like saying, “You can run, but you can’t hide”.

Well, back in the time of Jesus there was no “voice mail” or “texting”, but it sure does appear that poor Jairus is being “put on hold”. Jairus was an important figure in the community. Mark tells us he was “one of the synagogue officials”. However, he apparently wasn’t the kind of person who hid behind his office. When he sees Jesus, humbly “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.”

Jesus simply starts to follow after him, but as the crowd presses in on him he becomes “aware at once that power had gone out from him” and he stops, asking, “Who has touched my clothes”?

What a powerful insight this gives us into the person of Jesus. It isn’t just that he had the power to heal the woman who reached out and touched the hem of his garment, it is his sensitivity to someone reaching out to him in need. People around him didn’t understand that then, and too many of us don’t appreciate it now. Jesus is keenly aware of our crying out to him, reaching out to him with all of our needs.

The woman in the encounter represents so many of us who approach Jesus “in fear and trembling”. Maybe we believe that He can heal us, comfort us, or forgive us, yet still we are afraid. The woman, however, presses through her fear and “fell down before Jesus and told him the whole truth”.

What if her fear drove her deeper into the crowd and she ran away from the Lord, as many of us do, rather than falling down before him and acknowledging our truth? Would her healing have been complete? I suspect not. But the fact that she came to Jesus even “in fear and trembling” and fell down before him, she hears the blessed words, “Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be cured of your affliction.”

There’s poor Jairus. He’s been left “on hold”. Jesus doesn’t seem to appreciate the urgency of his request as he dithers with the woman and the crowd around her. This tormented Father then gets the worst news a parent can hear, “Your daughter has died”.

I can see him, crumbled to the ground, wailing and crying great tears, as he beats his fists into the graveled earth. “Why, Why, Why, O God?” Then Jesus turns his attention to this bereaved Father. I believe he approached him and gently laid a hand on his shoulder as he said, “Do not be afraid; just have faith”. Then he helped this distraught, trembling, broken man to his feet and with his hand around his waist accompanied him to his home. They break through the weeping, wailing crowd and Jesus addresses them, “Why this commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but asleep.” And perhaps presaging his own suffering and death, St. Mark tells us, “And they ridiculed him”.

Then taking the Mother and Father, and Peter, James, and John, he approaches the child lying upon her bed, “Talitha koum”, he murmurs, “Little girl, I say to you, arise!”

Do you notice there is no jubilation. St. Mark tells us, “At that they were utterly astounded”. Everyone was speechless, probably many were frightened, and maybe more than a few fell to their knees. Still, there were probably a few who claimed it was faked and smirked at the idea that Jesus could do such a thing. Jesus tells everyone to keep quiet about what they had just witnessed and then suggests the child should be given something to eat. Then he simply walked through the silent multitude into the stillness of the night.

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

This Gospel account invites us to reflect on the very heart of prayer. Jairus asks the Lord to intercede on behalf of his dying child, but the Lord seems to take his time, much as he does when Martha and Mary send word that their brother, Lazarus, is dying, and Jesus delays three days before he comes to them. Doesn't God appreciate the urgency of our prayers? Doesn't he understand that we need him now; we need an answer now; we want his help now? Where is God when we really, really need him?

It's instructive to recognize that Jesus does not forsake Jairus, does he? He stands right there beside him. He accompanies him on the journey to his sick child and when word comes that the child has died, Jesus is there to comfort him. When the time is right, when it becomes frighteningly clear that God alone can be glorified by his action, Jesus raises the girl to life, as he will Lazarus.

Our truth is that while we know that God loves us; we know that he is aware of our concerns; we have confidence that he is moved by our prayers, we feel helpless as we await his response.

Ramon and Ericka have brought their beautiful child, Benjamin, to be baptized. They offer him to God, believing, trusting, hoping that God will claim him as his own son that he may receive the protection and salvation that only God can give, that Benjamin may prosper in this life and for all of eternity. Their blessed assurance that their prayer for their child is heard is that they are surrounded by us, their Church, who readily and

willingly embrace Benjamin as a member of our Faith Family. By receiving him, through Baptism, into our community, we accept responsibility, together with his parents and godparents, to raise him up in a way that gives glory to God. That's what it means to be a member of a community of faith. We are responsible for each other and we are responsible to each other.

It is not conceivable that Jairus came to Jesus on his own when his daughter fell ill. It was the faith community that surrounded him that told him about Jesus. It was the faith community that surrounded him that told him where to find Jesus. And it was the faith community that surrounded him that journeyed with Jesus and Jairus to the bed of his dead daughter. And it was not just for Jairus, but for the faith community that surrounded him that Jesus glorified God by saying the words, "Talitha koum"; "Little girl, I say to you, arise!"

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Our Faith Community is bigger than our little parish here. We are part of the larger Faith Community, known as the Holy, Roman, Catholic Church. Together with the leaders of every other Faith Community on the earth, the leaders of our Church, including Pope Francis and all American Catholic Bishops have taken a moral, not a political position, in condemning as evil our government's action in taking and imprisoning children away from their parents and refusing to grant asylum to people fleeing for their lives from poverty and violence that would destroy them. This affront to human dignity has led millions of our fellow citizens into the streets of this nation proclaiming that "FAMILIES BELONG TOGETHER". Our government leaders who have imposed this abomination on the soul of our nation and brought shame on all of us claim they are acting in the interest of our national security. Now, they have put these parents and children "on hold".

The families being torn apart are much like this family of Ramon and Ericka. How, in God's name, can they be seen as a risk to our national security? Like Jairus, there are thousands of parents imprisoned by our government crying out to God to save their children and there are thousands of imprisoned children crying out for their Mommies and Daddies.

Much as God is giving us the shared responsibility to help little Benjamin here be raised as God would have him, God has given us the responsibility as citizens of this country to hear the cries of these parents, as Jesus heard the cries of Jairus, and say to these children, "TALITHA KOUM"; "LITTLE CHILDREN, I SAY TO YOU, ARISE!"

The leaders of every political persuasion for the past forty years have acknowledged that the system of immigration law in this country has been broken. It is also a basic tenet of American jurisprudence, based on English Common Law and the Natural Law that unjust laws are not binding. Further, the dignified, compassionate treatment of people seeking asylum from violence, starvation, poverty, and war is enshrined in international law subscribed to by the United States of America. While this suggests that the current Administration of our government did not create the problem, this ill-conceived, poorly planned, immoral solution exacerbates the problem rather than fixing it.

We are better than this. We have always understood and believed that the family is the basic unit of society. Families belong together. I plead with you, by all that is holy, by all that is just, by all that is righteous, do not be silent in the face of this diabolical evil. Contact every government official who is supposed to be responsive to you (remember “of the people, by the people, for the people”) and demand “TALITHA KOUM”; LITTLE CHILDREN, I SAY TO YOU, ARISE!”

Knowing that I will be ridiculed, much as Christ was ridiculed by some of those in the community surrounding Jairus, still I dare to recommend, not as a political statement, but as moral imperatives, five actions that our government should be taking and working toward:

- 1. Immediately reunite the presently separated and imprisoned families;**
- 2. Immediately afford those seeking asylum the dignity of their due process right under the law by providing able legal counsel and allowing them to present their cases for compassionate consideration;**
- 3. Immediately stop declaring and imprisoning “illegal” persons as criminally libel when our own laws consider such “illegal” entry into our country as a misdemeanor that does not require imprisonment;**
- 4. Create an immediate pathway to citizenship for those persons brought into the country “illegally” as children, the so-called “Dreamers”, who have never known life anywhere but right here in the United States;**
- 5. Do the hard-work that you were elected to do. Create a fair and just system of immigration law that is respectful of all people, as well as being respectful of our borders and need for security in a non-partisan fashion.**

In calling for these moral imperatives to be enacted by our government leaders, we continue the miraculous work of Christ and proclaim, “TALITHA KOUM”, “LITTLE CHILDREN, I SAY TO YOU, ARISE!”