

Homily For Tuesday of the 4th Week of Ordinary Time - Year 1

St Peter's 8:30/7:00 Masses - January 31, 2023

(Memorial - St. John Bosco)

Hebrews 12:1-4 "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood."

Psalms 22:25-31 "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord."

Mark 5:21-43 "Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was healed."

A Cloud of Witnesses

Introduction

A high school track coach was disappointed that several of his boys had done more poorly in their races than he expected. It wasn't that he thought they should all win, but there was something missing in their performance. Shortly after the race, he noticed them playing in a field. They were running and jumping over fences, so he called them over. Pointing out how much energy they were exerting in their game, he explained that the training they had done was so that they would be successful in a race like today. Looking at them hard, he declared in his Scottish manner, "Ye did not give it all ye had, lads." They did not seem to care that their coach was cheering for them with all his heart.

Hebrews

The daily readings from the Letter to the Hebrews have been providing images of an arena where a great competition is going on. Yesterday, there was a 'Hall of Fame' list of the great champions. Out of weakness they were made strong by faith. They were saints "of whom the world was not worthy." And so they received not a worldly reward but a heavenly one.

But in today's passage from that letter, now we are in the arena. We are being watched by the saints in heaven, what today's passage calls "a great crowd of witnesses." There are so many of them that they look like one cloud. But they are not just watching. They are cheering us on in our ordeals. They want you and I to be people "of whom the world is not worthy." They are jumping out of their seats with excitement for our race.

Our race, our struggle is against sin, against the forces of evil, both in the world but also within us. The Greek word for this struggle is 'agon'. Our 'agon', our agony is a striving, a giving everything we have in the face of our temptations to be selfish and lazy, not working at prayer.

St. John Bosco

St. John Bosco is one of those witnesses who are cheering for you and me today. He was born in Italy to a poor farming family. His father died when he was two, leaving his religious instruction to his pious mother. At the age of nine he had his first of many powerful visions which would come throughout his life. It is quite remarkable how often Mary is shown as queen among those witnesses, inspiring her spiritual children to become saints. In his vision, Jesus and the Virgin Mary showed St. John Bosco that he was to instruct poor, wayward boys and bring them back to God. As a priest, he became cheerleader for those boys who were driven to desperate conditions in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. Many of these street boys ended up in prison as teenagers. Don Bosco became a mentor and spiritual director to them, helping them to live a life of virtue and saving many from a future of crime and poverty. He taught them as a spiritual father.

Mark

Of course the saints are all imitating Jesus himself. Today, the Gospel presents us with two struggling people. One is well off but his twelve year old daughter is dying. The other is a suffering woman who has lost everything while seeking a cure for her twelve years of bleeding. Blood is at the centre of this struggle. For the girl, blood would be a sign of maturing if death did not prevent it. For the woman, that sign of the capacity to give life was out of control. Of course, Jesus will purify and heal and make fruitful their blood by the shedding of his own.

Jairus is certain Jesus can cure his daughter, while the woman did not dare to bother the master, but noiselessly came up behind Him and softly touched his cloak. Both of them fall down before him. Jesus tells Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe." Jesus tells the woman, "Daughter, your faith has made you well."

Pope Benedict XVI says, "We ask God to heal so many problems, our practical needs, and this is right, but what we must ask him for insistently is an ever firmer faith, so that the Lord may renew our life." The catechism tells us, "Healing infirmities or forgiving sins, Jesus always responds to a prayer offered in faith."

The crowds around Jesus are astonished that he heals the woman by physical contact. Instead of being made unclean by the contact, he makes her clean. The power to do this comes from God but the faith of the sick person is necessary. The crowds in the house laugh at Jesus. But he raises the girl by touching her.

Call To Conversion

We know that Jesus is our Messiah, our Christ, our Saviour, our Lord. That's a matter of faith in what is true, yet hard for the world to believe. But the way he saves us is to enter into our lives, into our uncleanness. We are like that woman who has an outward sign of her sin. It clings to her, but Jesus enters right into the middle of it. Instead of being tainted by our sin, he takes on our sin.

Only God can look at our death as a kind of sleeping, because the life to which we hope to be raised is so far above this one that the death at the end of this life is temporary, like sleep. It's always in the darkest moments when God is most able to act. That is when we are most likely to fall down before him in desperate faith. It's also a time when temptation may lead us to give up, or to seek only what the world has to offer.

St. John Bosco says: "We find ourselves in this earth as in a tempestuous sea, in a desert, in a vale of tears. Now then, Mary is the Star of the Sea, the solace of our desert, the light that guides us towards heaven."

Like Jairus, fall down before him. Ask him to heal us. Ask him to heal our friends and family. Like the woman, fall down before him in fear and trembling. In faith, get close enough to Jesus to touch the hem of his robe. He will not reject you. He will not be afraid of our infirmity. It will not cling to him like it tends to do with us. Our faith will make us well. A cloud of witnesses are cheering for us right now.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *Whoever obeys and teaches the commandments of the Lord will be called great in the kingdom of heaven, says the Lord.*

Collect: *O God, who raised up the priest St John Bosco as a father and teacher of the young, grant that, aflame with the same fire of love, we may seek out souls and serve you alone.*

Hebrews: *Beloved, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside the sin that clings so closely and let us run with perseverance the race before us, looking to Jesus who endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Jesus who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*

Psalms: *Those who seek him shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live forever. All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. And I shall live for the Lord.*

Mark: *One of the leaders of the synagogue, named Jairus, fell at his feet and begged him, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her." So Jesus went with him. A large crowd pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak. Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was healed. Aware that power had gone forth from him. Jesus turned and said, "Who touched my clothes?" His disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you. How can you say, 'Who touched me?'" The woman came in fear and trembling, fell down before him and told him the whole truth. He said, "Daughter your faith has made you well. Go in peace." Some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead." But Jesus said, "Do not fear, only believe." Jesus saw people weeping loudly. He said to them, "Why do you weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him. He took the child by the hand and said to her, "Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl got up. She was twelve years of age. At this, they were overcome with amazement.*