

Thirteenth Sunday of Year B – Keeping Hope

In today's Gospel a contrast is drawn between those who have given up hope and those who keep hope alive despite all that militates against it.

Those who see the little girl as beyond hope are in consternation, weeping and wailing.

The parents, who refuse to accept defeat, are at first desperately concerned, and at the finish are quite overcome with astonishment. Their trust is rewarded.

We are to understand from this Gospel event that *losing* hope will bring an even greater distress upon those who are already suffering. *Retaining* hope, however, brings strength and persistence in the time of trial and bears fruit in a renewal of life.

Sometimes we are tempted to give up hope on **ourselves**. If our plans and dreams remain unrealised; if our efforts seem to achieve little or no progress; if something we have brought into being through much labour and love, an enterprise or venture that we cherish, begins to falter and decline, or is stifled by another's attitude or actions.

We are tempted to give up hope when our struggles to remain virtuous in a particular respect end in sinful failures time and again; or if we realise what a mess we have made of the intimate relationships of life. We can be fearful to enter such friendships again; we have lost confidence, we dare not risk being hurt a second time.

It may be that we are losing our hope for **others who are dear to us**. They seem beyond our reach, and we are compelled to stand and watch as they make a shipwreck of their lives; or we see them drifting further and further away from us – or from God. Our anxiety for long-standing friends or members of our own family can give way to desperation and perhaps even to despair.

Perhaps the distress we suffer is caused by our experience of the **society** in which we live, or by what we see and hear of the wider world of international relationships. There seems to be so much selfishness, depravity, violence and corruption.

As we strive to keep hope alive there will always be, as there are in the Gospel story, those around who laugh at our ideals and beliefs, who mock, who accuse us of refusing to accept the reality of the situation.

The Lord speaks to us: *Do not be afraid; only have faith.*

We notice how he dismisses those who scoff. Then, in the presence of those who believe, he takes the little child by the hand and raises her up – to the amazement and delight of her family.

Their hopes were not, after all, without foundation. They were not, in fact, misplaced.

In today's Scriptures the Church invites us to pray that Jesus will come in to our **own** hearts and lives to lift our spirits up; that he will dismiss pessimism and cynicism; give us fresh courage, the will to keep going, the strength to begin again.

We are to pray for **others who are precious to us**: that He will reach into their lives - where we cannot reach; that those who have become lost may return to their senses – to a re-awakened awareness of where they truly belong.

We are to pray for our own **society** and for our **world**: to fall, with Jairus, at Jesus' feet and perhaps use his very words: *Lord, she is desperately sick, lay your hands on her, make her better, save her life.*

The words of the Psalm express the trust we are to foster within ourselves:

*The Lord will listen and have pity,
The Lord will come to our help.
He will change our mourning into dancing,
He will raise our souls from the dead,
He will rescue us.
At night there are tears, but joy comes with the dawn.*

[See also *Spes Salvi*, encyclical letter of Pope Benedict XVI]