

Homily notes

As you reflect upon and pray with the liturgical readings for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday—with its theme *Because of Her, We Can*—you might focus on three aspects of the gospel passage: (a) women as the major characters in the two healing stories; (b) the significance of faith for these healings; and (c) Jesus' healing power transforming a broken world. At the conclusion of this reflection, I will propose a connection with Mary's place in the history of our salvation.

Both Jairus's daughter and the woman with the flow of blood find themselves at the edge of Israel's communal and religious life. The twelve year old is reported to be dead, and the woman is utterly marginalized. She has suffered from uncontrolled menstrual bleeding for twelve years, which renders her constantly ritually impure. She is unable to play an active part in the community of Israel. Her ailment, therefore, is far more than a medical problem; it banishes her to the margins of the communal and religious life of Israel.

In both of these healings, Jesus responds to faith. The woman's faith was aroused when she heard about Jesus, and she knew that touching his cloak would be enough. It was Jesus who sensed that God had acted through him, and told the woman that her faith in what God could do through him had made her whole. In the other healing story, Jesus responds to the faith of the synagogue official Jairus. Jesus insists that faith must replace fear, he takes the girl by the hand, and she is healed.

The healing miracles are a central part of Jesus' ministry and are only understood in relationship with him, through faith. He rejects the idea of self-authenticating or spectacular miracles; he rejects acts which might simply draw attention to himself. Rather, Jesus' healings express God's desire to liberate women and men from suffering. The reign of God is coming about through his healings. They are a liberation not just from disease, but from social, personal, and religious alienation.

Toward the end of her beautiful book about Mary the mother of Jesus, *Truly Our Sister*, New York-based theologian Elizabeth Johnson reflects on the Magnificat (Luke 1:39-56), Mary's song praising God for the gift of a child. She praises God for overcoming the oppression of a broken world—exalting the lowly and sending the hungry away with good things. Johnson sums up the meaning of the Magnificat in these words: "Mary sings pregnant with hope, bearing the Messiah, embodying the historic reversal she proclaims. Who shall mother the Messiah? Not a well-protected queen, not someone blessed with a bounteous table and a peaceful life, not a well-regarded woman of influence. Indeed, there is nothing wrong with these things; peace and abundant nourishment are among the blessings hoped for in the messianic age. But the world is distorted by sin. People accumulate power and wealth at the expense of others. Suffering is rampant. And the pattern persists through the generations. Into this unjust situation comes the choice of God, Creator and Redeemer of the world. Hearing the cries of the oppressed,

seeing their misery, knowing well what they are suffering, coming down to redeem, the Holy One aims to turn the unjust order of things upside down and make the world right again, being faithful to the covenant promise. In the deepest revelatory insights of Jewish and Christian traditions, there is no other God." [Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 270-71.]

In light of the readings for National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday, and in the lead-up to the Plenary Council in 2020, we must, as a Catholic community, attend to the Spirit of God at work among us, and to the healing that the Spirit seeks to bring. One dimension of this healing concerns an adequate response to the needs of the whole Aboriginal community. Another concerns the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the constitution, and their having a far more significant voice in Australia's governance. A further dimension of healing suggested by the gospel passage is the need to develop a church life in which women's equal dignity is recognized.

Fr James McEvoy

Australian Catholic University, & Aboriginal Catholic Community Adelaide