

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
June 28, 2015

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Anytime you connect with Almighty God in a direct and personal way expect obstructions and roadblocks to develop and threaten the relationship. The cause of these roadblocks may be pride within us. Or it can be the pagan world attempting to pull us along with it and away from Christ. The message of today's gospel is *more about Jairus and his perseverance* than about his daughter and her return to life.

It is a mistake to distance ourselves from Jairus by pointing out his Christian virtues and discipline. He was no Christian at all but a ruler of the local synagogue. And there is nothing remarkable about a father seeking help for his child. Most any father will do this. Jairus comes to the Lord knowing Jesus has a reputation for helping those in need. And the Son of God does not need any more than that! We are told that as soon as Jesus stepped off the boat and heard the plea, He set out at once for the home where the sick girl was lying in bed.

On the way, the Lord was detained. He healed the woman with the issue of blood. But during this delay the little girl died. This is where the conventional wisdom put up its first obstruction. Whoever conveyed the bad news summed it up: "Alas, we must not trouble the Rabbi any further. It's too late now." Conventional wisdom is that the case does not merit further attention. And if Jairus persists in his grief and sticks to his request, *it is Jairus who becomes the problem*. Jairus will become the pain in the neck and an embarrassment. "He's not facing reality." So says the world.

Suppose last week the United State Supreme Court declared that from now on a hot fudge sundae is made with butterscotch sauce! And if we say **no**, that by definition a hot fudge sundae contains hot fudge, then according to the law of the land and the conventional wisdom *we* become the problem and the source of derision. That was the world's verdict on Jairus: "He's not facing reality." We have a thing or two to learn from this first-century synagogue ruler.

This is where the Blessed Lord intervened. Jesus said words which got into Jairus' soul before despair could set in and paralyze his will. The Son of God said, "Do

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not be afraid. Only believe.” Jesus must have heard the news that the little girl was dead. But He did not seek to console the father. Rather, in order for the relationship between God and this soul to continue, faith needed to be kept alive in Jairus. We get the feeling *Jairus himself had a crucial role to play* and that without his faith the little girl would not be restored to life. How easily this could be a story with a tragic ending. Great possibilities for faith were not grasped. How many stories end that way? It would have been so easy for Jairus to say to Jesus, “Sorry, Lord; it’s too late. I know you have other things to do. I guess I had better go bury my daughter.” Had we been present, none of us would have faulted the logic.

But remember this incident is not about the little girl’s return to life. It is about a soul which made contact with his creator and now had to overcome the obstacles that inevitably try to block the relationship. Jesus gave a word not of consolation but *an electric charge of hope* so that Jairus would go on. “Do not fear; only believe.” And it works! Jairus, who is at the very end of his emotions, goes silently and trembling behind Jesus heading for the death room. Looking at this procession, everybody laughs. “Jairus, you poor sad fool.” Everybody laughs.... except Almighty God! The radiant look on the beautiful face of the Redeemer is encouraging and confident.

Now comes the second obstacle. When Jesus said the girl is not dead but sleeping the bystanders began to laugh *at the Lord*. Look up the word “laughter” in your Bible concordance and you will get an appreciation of all the times in the gospel accounts when laughter followed Jesus.....all the way to the Cross. Marriage of course is not a hot fudge sundae! But in both natural and supernatural law you and I insist marriage *by definition* has within it a component for new life. And we will be met with derisive laughter and contempt. And every Christian, and those on the way to becoming Christian, learn first to stop making that noise, and then stop being influenced by it.

The second obstacle gave the grieving father opportunity to say, “Master, never mind. Thanks for coming, and for caring. But they’re right. I shouldn’t have bothered you further.” But right here is the great triumph of this scene. *The man*

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bites his lip and says nothing! He has sided with the Lord against the world and its conventional wisdom. And the angelic host is shouting YES.

Saint Peter was present when all this took place. No doubt this incident was in his preaching in later years. We can just hear Peter describe the stillness of the death room one moment. Then to their amazement this little girl was on her feet, blinking at everyone as her brain cleared and she became herself again. Peter would remark how simply, *how very simply*, Jesus observed the girl must be hungry, so give her something to eat. “He made nothing of it” Peter would say quietly, and then add slowly, “*but the girl had been cold stone dead.*”

Seek Jesus as Jairus did. And face the same obstacles and contempt. At least twice Jairus could have excused the Lord from any further involvement. Jesus would have gone His way and there would have been no return to life for the little girl. Like Jairus, we are encouraged to be brave enough and persevere. And then, having placed ourselves in Jesus’ hands, let Him do with us as He wills. That will mean life for us, and as with Jairus, it might mean life for someone else too.