

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
June 28 & 29, 2015

S. Kathleen Osbelt  
All Saints Parish,  
Syracuse, NY

### “Agents of Life”

During the recession of 2008, a friend of mine feared that his business would go bankrupt. Every night we would come in dragging. His wife suggested to his five year old daughter that she ought to give daddy a big hug to cheer him up. When he came through the door his daughter ran up to him and hugged him so hard that her father said: “Honey, you are hugging me to death.” “No, daddy,” she returned, “I am hugging you to life!” The little one restored him to life.

But that’s all about Jesus, hugging people to life.

The first reading today is from the opening book of Wisdom, written just a few years before Jesus is born. This author had access to all that had been written throughout the 1200 years before and the conclusion is that God is a God of life. God does not rejoice in the destruction of life. God created all things to have life. The creatures of the world have health in them. God’s image is imprinted on them. The author concluded God is all about giving life!

This is followed by an interesting letter of Paul to the Corinthians which is basically saying that next Sunday there will be a collection to help those in Jerusalem who are dying because of the famine. Paul says that Jesus has made us rich in faith, knowledge, concern and love. So we must not hold on to anything that is in excess when there are people in need. The Corinthians were to restore their neighbors to life.

We are to be agents of life for one another. In using the gifts God has given us we are to bring life to others.

Jesus took people where they were and brought them to life. In today's Gospel, a very important man, Jairus, an official of the synagogue, who called the shots as to what scripture was read in synagogue, who would preach, what hymns could be sung, etc. It had to have been a matter of desperation for him to go to Jesus because even then, the synagogue officials were suspicious of Jesus, this new rebel rouser. Jairus threw himself at the feet of Jesus begging Jesus to cure his ailing daughter. She is 12, the age when a female in that culture would be given to marriage. She had her whole life in front of her. So Jesus changes directions and goes with Jairus.

But on their way, Jesus stops and asks who touched me. The disciples are incredulous, there is a whole crowd pushing and shoving and Jesus wants to know who touched him. One biblical translation reads: "He could hardly breathe for the crowds." But Jesus knew there was a gentle, tenuous touch, and he felt power go out from him. It was the touch of a desperate woman who had been experiencing death for 12 years because of hemorrhaging. She was by law, ritually unclean, a social outcast, not even allowed to be in the public. She, like Jairus, was desperate, fearful. She fearfully kneels down and tells Jesus why she touched him. He does not criticize her, reprimand or critique her. Jesus receives her and says: "Your faith has made you well." He gives her back her life. She is restored to community life.

In the meantime, people came from Jairus' house to say it's too late, the girl has died. Jairus is devastated. But Jesus is gracious and loving. He turns to Jairus, touching his shoulder says: "Don't be afraid now, only believe and she will be made well." Jesus goes to the girl, takes her hand, and loves her back into life. He tells them to give her something to eat. Such an ordinary way to be a part of the family again. She is restored to community life.

That's our mission. To be agents of life. To restore others to community life.

Our Just Faith group had the privilege of hearing a 19 year old speak, through Waded, our interpreter, about his life after he escaped gangs in Mexico. At 15, Manuel (not his real name) came to Baja, California, by way of a "coyote." He owed the "coyote" three thousand dollars so the arrangements were made for

him to work in a quarry. That's where a 1200 lb. bolder severely injured his foot. He was told to leave because he was no longer of use to the owners. He then had to work on a dairy farm. He often went without pay, was beaten, and kept for a few months in the basement of a barn. Finally, after escaping from that dairy farm, he was helped by some men who knew a woman from this area who has been helping migrants. Through her help he has been given care for his foot. Another woman has given found him lodging. They have been agents of life for Manuel. When our group asked Manuel what he needs from us, he said "respect."

In Joy of the Gospel: "Jesus, the evangelizer par excellence and the Gospel in person, identifies with the little ones. This reminds us Christians that we are called to care for the vulnerable of the earth. But the current model, with its emphasis on success and self-reliance, does not appear to favor an investment in efforts to help the slow, the weak or the less talented to find opportunities in life."

I would imagine if we asked the earth what it needs from us, it would say the same: respect. If we asked anyone in the LGBT Community, anyone who is an African American, anyone who is newly immigrated to the U.S., anyone who is living on the streets, any child born into poverty, the answer would sound again: respect. The Christian call is to give respect and life to all that is living, including the earth, and give life back to them where it has been taken away out of disrespect.

And while we are trying to be life-givers we must not give up hope that things can change. Look at this week alone: an encyclical on the environment; the Affordable Care Act; marriage equality; the incredible mercy and forgiveness given by the people at Emmanuel Church in Charleston; new grass roots movements to eradicate racism; and a black President singing "Amazing Grace."

It is by God's grace that we too can be agents of change, agents of life for others.