Quite often I will meet new people in social settings, and when they find out I’m a priest, they will express regret that they no longer attend church. I of course immediately invite them to ‘come back’, and their response will be, “*Father, with everything I’ve done, I would feel like a hypocrite if I came to church*”, to which I always respond, “*Wonderful! We’re always looing for one more!*” 🡪 You know, if we only let perfect people in, the church would be empty every Sunday, and your illustrious pastor would be turned away at the door as well!

*The Church isn’t a museum for saints, but rather it is a hospital for sinners*. I’m sure I’ve said this in a homily before, but it bears repeating to remind us of what the church *is*. It exists not to celebrate our holiness, but to *heal us* of our sinfulness. The church doesn’t exist to show everybody how great we are, but rather to expose us for *who* we are 🡪 a people that freely admit we are not perfect, and that we are humble enough to admit that *because* we are not perfect, we need God, and humble enough to admit we are all in need of healing through an *encounter* with Jesus Christ. The Church exists to facilitate that *encounter.*

It always amazes me how Jesus wants to work in the lives of those on the ‘*outside*’ so to speak. In our gospel today, we hear about Jairus, a Synagogue official begging Jesus to heal his dying daughter. As a Synagogue official, Jairus would have been an important person in Jewish life, so coming to this itinerant preacher named Jesus indeed would have been a humbling action. Even though he was a ‘high up’ religious official, he knew he was *powerless* in saving his daughter, and in his desperation he was willing to come to Jesus, even if he may have been reluctant to do so. But as any father would attest, he would be willing to do *anything* to save his child.

Fortunately, all Jesus needs is a *small drop of faith* in order for him to be able to work in our lives – in order for him to heal us of our wounds. If Jesus waited for us to become perfect Christians before he would be willing to show mercy and compassion toward us, we would be in big trouble!

But fortunately, Jesus is in the business of *encounter*, of a *relationship* leading to changed lives, and transformation of hearts.

The people around Jesus seem to heartlessly tell Jairus to ‘*leave the teacher alone*’ as the daughter had already died, but in light of Jewish law this was very practical advice as one would be rendered ritually unclean by being in the presence of the deceased if you weren’t immediate family, which meant he would be banned from worship in the Synagogue.

But, Jesus likes to break through boundaries, and goes to heal the girl – he *touches* her and we discover that it is not him who becomes unclean, but *he* now renders clean. The old laws are being superseded – we discover that we are all made clean now not through adherence to the law which could never suffice, but through an *encounter* with the Son of God.

‘*Talitha Koum*’ – ‘*little girl, arise!*’ – Jesus uses the same words for ‘*rise*’ that he will use to describe his own resurrection, foreshadowing for all of us the hope that even though we may face woundedness, challenges and death, we will live through Him. And in the instruction to give the girl something to eat, Jesus foreshadows the Eucharist which will sustain us in the risen life we are given in baptism, and the pledge of eternal life that he promises.

*Jesus heals through encounter*, which really highlights the importance of the sacraments which he gives us for this purpose. The direct encounter with Christ is certainly true of the Eucharist, Reconciliation, and the Sacrament of the Sick which is also very much foreshadowed here in the encounter with the little girl. We don’t talk about this sacrament often enough, but when we are experiencing serious illness, we should avail ourselves to the Sacrament of the Sick – there is a misconception that we can’t be anointed until we are dying, which is often referred to as the ‘Last Rites’, and although the Sacrament can and is administered at the end of life, it is meant to be used *wheneve*r we are experiencing serious illness, as it is the one sacrament which quite literally re-presents the healing touch of Jesus through the anointing with oil for healing of body and spirit.

“*Do not be afraid; just have faith.*” We heard in the gospel a couple of weeks ago about the power of faith can have even if it’s as small as a mustard seed – that’s all Jesus requires to begin an *encounter* – to begin a deep and abiding personal relationship with Him that can heal our wounds, and transform our hearts. Even if we struggle with our faith, Jesus just asks us to open the window a crack – that’s all he needs to enter in, to *touch us*, to *heal us*, to *encounter us*.

We recall that the *Church is not a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners*, and we as the Church have the great commission to facilitate those encounters with Christ, remembering that like Jairus, all we need is a mere spark of faith in order to ignite the fire, that Jesus may touch us all where we need healing, and that through his resurrection he may raise us all up to new life in Him.