

This past week I finished reading a book called “Faith, Hope and Carnage”.

It is a book that was published in 2022 but I only recently found out about it from an *online interview* (by Krista Tippett). And I’m indebted to my wife Jennifer for first finding the interview and sharing. Within the past two years, this is the second great spiritual discovery that has come through a completely unexpected route of...one thing leading to another...which leads to another...until...*there it is*.

So the *book* “Faith, Hope and Carnage” is also an *interview*. It features the Australian musician...*Nick Cave*. I was only vaguely aware of Cave—even though he has been performing my entire adult life. In fact, he is just a year younger than me. But, I’m actually not bringing him up specifically because of his music—but, again, because of *the interview in his book*. [But if you want to check out his most recent album “Ghosteen” then that would be the place to begin.] In his book Cave talks very candidly about the creative process and life of being a musician...and also his struggle with addiction, the unexpected death of his young son Arthur, and the ways that grief has changed him and his wife. And in the midst of all that...he has very articulate things to say in the book about *his rediscovery of Christianity*...including the fact that he now often *goes to church*...and when he goes...it is usually an Anglican church if he is in England or Australia—or an Episcopal church if he is here in the States. He loves our prayer book worship. His words really moved me—and it has been one of the most profound experiences I have had reading a book. It was like being invited into Cave’s home...and being a silent witness...to his conversation with the interviewer.

But then, shortly before I finished the book, I ran across an article online which was basically an *analysis* of Nick Cave’s religious experience. And even though the writer was largely sympathetic, I found the analysis to be especially...unsatisfying and unhelpful. Even though I am quite accustomed to the need for analysis...since as a priest, I have to do it every week with biblical and theological texts and church issues as they arise. But in comparison with Cave’s own articulation of his experience and thoughts, that published analysis of Cave’s religious experience just felt so...flat...and detached.

I have since thought about that as something of a *cautionary tale*... of the limitations of...a homily...and a lot of the God talk...the Church tries to do. It is of course unavoidable that I as a priest...must speak *about* Jesus...*about* God...*about* the Holy Spirit...*about* the Bible and the Church...*about* forgiveness and responsibility...*about* salvation and healing. As Christians we must find how best to speak *about* many such things...and do it as best we can. But our *talking about*...such things...can never be...a substitute for *our own encounter*...with these divine mysteries...*and our own effort*...to articulate our own experience of life and God. Because we are talking about something that is *real*...and not just an *abstraction*. |

So, for example, I could go on, in this homily, to *abstract* about any number of interesting things about the Gospel lesson today—about Jesus and his encounter with Jairus...and Jesus and the unnamed woman...and it could indeed have merit. For example, there are many fair questions and observations that deserve to be named, like:

- What does it mean that there was healing power residing in Jesus’ very *body*?
- Did Jesus really not know who touched him?
- Can personal *desperation* be accounted as *faith*?
- Apparently, modern folks are not the only people who have not been inclined to believe Jesus could raise a person from death—the bystanders in that story just laughed at him.
- Why would Jesus raise the girl from death when she would still eventually have to die again just like everybody else?
- Is it only a coincidence that the girl was 12 years old...and the woman had been sick for 12 years?
- Why did Jesus order Jairus’ family and friends not to tell anyone about the girl being raised from the dead?

Oh there is a lot that this homily could go on *about*--and justly so. But I’m not going to do that today.

Because all those good questions are still very different from...a *personal experience* of such things. If we could only have the experience...of a *conversation*... with Jairus and his daughter...or with the woman made well...or with those who laughed at Jesus but then saw things differently. That would be so different...so powerful. But we cannot. |

But...we can...imagine it. |

And one way to imagine it...is to allow the story to ask us...some very personal questions...like:

- Have you ever been so distraught...or so fearful...that you have...or would have...*begged*...somebody...or God...for help? Do you know what that feels like? | |
- Or, have you ever been too proud...or too ashamed...to ask for help? |
- Have you ever been so sick...for a long time...or cared for someone sick for a long time...and know first-hand the sense of isolation, weariness, and rejection that that can bring?
- Have you ever been caught in a skepticism about your faith that you didn't know how to resolve? |

If any of these questions stir up something in you...*then you have just imagined your way...toward an encounter...with these people in this Gospel story...and their experience of God in Jesus.* And then who knows what might happen next? |

And here, I am going to finish...by risking...a little analysis.

The Gospel stories are full of people who just kept coming to Jesus...struggling with all kinds of things...sickness, infirmity, torment, fear, and death. And they were obviously...or secretly desperate. Nick Cave says in his interview that it has been his experience that...“Hope...is optimism...with a broken heart” (p. 271). | That rings true to me. So many broken hearts...have looked for God in Jesus...and found...something very real.

And, in fact...it is possible...that we can still...*touch Jesus' body*...with our own desperation...for the possibility of our own healing. You see, there is a strange way of talking about Jesus that can be found in the New Testament. And we don't often talk about it...but the Apostle Paul talked about it a lot. We tend to just say the words *because he said them*—like a lot of things that Christians say. But then some of these common things we say...can suddenly become transparent to us. So this strange that Paul used to talk about is the “Body of Christ” in the world—even after Jesus had ascended back to God. Why didn't he just talk about the “spirit” of Christ instead of something tangible like a “body”—and how could it be Jesus' body?! Well, Paul really believed that the *Church*...as a whole...*is... now...*the Body of Christ: “Now, *you*, are the *body of Christ* and individually members of him” (1 Co. 12:27).

And...there is yet another way that we talk about the Body of Christ...that is even more familiar than the scripture. *Every Sunday that we receive Holy Communion*—when the consecrated bread is given with the words: “*The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life*”. This really does mean that the Body of Christ...is not in some ancient past...or just words in the Bible ...but *now*. The Body of Christ is...*now*...and of all things it is his Church...and it is the bread. And the Body of Christ is...*you*...and *I*...together...in one shared communion.

As it turns out, we can still...touch...the Body of Christ...right in broad daylight...in the Church...and the bread...here...and in so many other churches.

And we can still...touch...the Body of Christ...secretly...in a trustworthy private conversation...among the members of his Body...or in the words of an unexpected book...that can appear out of nowhere...from a stranger...who in his own way...has also found the Body of Christ...for his own healing...right along with us.