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One of the paintings on the sanctuary wall of St Michael's in Rivelin is that of the raising of the daughter of Jairus. I often refer to this scene when doing funerals there.

One of the most distressing situations for any priest is to officiate at the funeral of a young person or child where the parents are numb with grief, traumatised. Over the years I've done a sprinkling of these funerals. From a purely human point of view it seems contrary to the normal cycle of life when parents outlive their children.

Isn't it precisely this impending situation which brought the distraught Jairus to his knees imploring Jesus to heal his dying daughter? Jesus knows she is not going to live and when a messenger arrives with the inevitable bad news Jesus tells the synagogue official "*not to be afraid but only have faith*".

That sometimes happens to us too where we're facing any situation of loss, not just losing an offspring. We can lose our job, lose our mind, lose our home, lose our good name, lose a parent through family break-up - whatever. Like Jairus we beg Jesus to help us, but if things get worse despite our pleading, we fear the worse. But, as with Jairus, that is precisely what Jesus tells us not to do, no matter how bleak the situation.

The crowd don't exactly help Jairus either when, on hearing the bad news they advise Jesus not to proceed any further because the girl has just died. Sometimes, when we're facing a harrowing situation people can be more of a hindrance than a help especially when all they have to offer is worldly wisdom but very little in the realm of faith. People like that are often labelled 'Job's comforters'.

In bringing the little girl back to life, Jesus is telling us that our faith in the power of God will enable us to overcome the fear of death which is waiting in the wings for all of us. Even though it

goes against the natural order of things for children to die before their parents, God sometimes breaks what is the norm in order to draw people into a deeper awareness of the shortness of life in general. What does it say in one of the Psalms: *"Lord, make us know the shortness of life that we may gain wisdom of heart"*.

In Africa today, especially in the drought stricken areas, the death of children is quite a common occurrence, a situation which, I would say, the world is not paying enough attention to. But some of the better known saints were called back to God in their youth or even younger - St Theresa (24), Dominic Savio (14), St Aloysius Gonzaga (23), St Bernadette of Lourdes (37), the children of Fatima, Francisco 11 and Jacinta 10 and St Maria Goretti (11) whose feast we celebrate this week. There is no guarantee that holiness keeps pace with getting older. (They say: 'there's no fool like an old fool'.)

The raising of the daughter of Jairus was but a prelude to His own and indeed our ultimate Resurrection at the end of time when, as St Thomas Aquinas says, our bodies will be restored to their pristine youthful condition.