

**Reflection on the Gospel-13<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B  
(Mark 5:21-43)**

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As noted in relation to Mark 3:21-35, Mark's gospel often has a story within a story. Some scholars refer to this technique as the making of a Markan sandwich, others as a framing device. In Mark 5:21-43, the frame consists of the two-part story of the desperately ill twelve year old daughter of Jairus, a synagogue official. Jairus falls at the feet of Jesus in an attitude of reverence and pleads with him to come and lay hands on her. Jesus is clearly known as a healer, one who can "save" life. The passage closes with the young woman's seeming death and restoration to life. In between, we have the story of an older woman, also seriously ill, possibly with a gynaecological problem: she has been haemorrhaging for twelve years.

The stories are linked in many ways, first by the repetition of the number twelve-a symbolic number in a Jewish context. Both the young Jewish woman and the older Jewish woman are in need of the saving power of God mediated through Jesus the healer. Later in the Markan story (7:24-30), a Gentile mother will also beg for healing for her daughter who will receive that same saving power of God. Jairus' daughter does not speak for herself. Like all young women of that culture, ill or not, she is dependent on the voice of her father. The older woman comes tentatively "from behind". She speaks, but only to herself, as she touches Jesus' cloak and experiences healing in her body. The healing power of God suffuses even the fabric of a protective outer garment. The woman is finally shamed into telling all. Like Jairus, she falls at the feet of Jesus. Jairus refers to his child on the brink of adulthood as "my daughter". Jesus addresses the older woman as "my daughter".

Both women, the younger and the older, are daughters of Israel. Both are restored to health, one on account of her parents' faith (the faith of an unnamed mother and a named father), the other because of her own faith. Jesus the healer has embraced and responded to the pain of a woman alone on the one hand and of a family (mother, father, and daughter) on the other.

Towards the end of the gospel (14:3-9), this Jesus who has brought healing to little children, to older women and younger women, to older men and younger men, to Jews and to Gentiles, will himself become the recipient of the healing ministry of an insightful woman who draws on Earth elements and pours out healing ointment. Jesus will recognise this action as a beautiful thing that she has done "in him" For now, the stories recount "the beautiful thing" that Jesus does in the lives of suffering humanity, irrespective of age or gender or status or ethnicity.