

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

-Veronica Lawson RSM

In Mark's gospel, we often find 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 a surprising attitude of reverence from a Jewish official. Jairus pleads with Jesus the itinerant preacher to come and lay hands on his daughter. 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 the two parts of this story, we hear of the plight of an older woman, also seriously ill, possibly with a gynaecological problem. She has been haemorrhaging for twelve years and has spent all her money on doctors to no avail.

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 and daughter will beg for and 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, through this touch, experiences healing in her body. Does the healing power of God suffuse even the fabric of Jesus' cloak? The woman is finally shamed into telling all. Like Jairus, she falls in desperation at the feet of Jesus.

Jairus refers to his little girl 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 the faith of her parents (the unnamed mother and the 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. He will recognise this action as a beautiful thing that she has done "in him" For now, the stories recount "the beautiful thing" he does in the lives of suffering humanity, irrespective of age or gender or status or ethnicity.