

LITTLE GIRL, I SAY YOU, GET UP!

Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Mk 5.21-43

When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' "

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher any more?" Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, "Don't be afraid; just believe." He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At

this they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

In the two episodes of the *Girl Restored to Life* and the *Woman Healed* the evangelist wants to represent the condition of people of Israel. Those who are subject to Law are dead and those who are not subject to Law are unclean, just like the Woman Healed.

What links the two episodes is:

- Number “**twelve**”, indicates both the years of sickness of the woman and the age of the daughter of the synagogue ruler. Number “twelve” we know represents the twelve tribes of Israel, meaning the whole Israel.
- The term “**daughter**”, used by Jesus for the woman healed and for the daughter of the synagogue ruler.

Both situations talk about healing, a restoring to life through an infringement. Jesus touches, takes the girl by the hand, one of a dead girl – the Book of Leviticus states it was forbidden to touch a dead body – and the girl is restored to life; while in the passage we are going to analyze, the woman herself accomplishes an infringement.

The evangelist writes that this anonymous “*woman*” – that is that she is a representative character with which every reader can identify – “*had been subject to bleeding for twelve years*”. Blood represents life and bleeding means losing life. Such a woman, according to the Book of Leviticus, is always unclean. If she is unmarried, nobody will marry her; if she’s married, she cannot have sexual intercourses with her husband, being therefore condemned to sterility, on the contrary the husband is even allowed to repudiate her.

Therefore this is a hopeless woman; she is unclean, she is not allowed in the Temple, she cannot celebrate the Passover, she’s like a leprous.

She is hopeless, then; if she goes on obeying Law she will encounter death, but, having she heard about Jesus and his message, the one who purifies the leprous, the one who doesn’t care about merits of people, but only cares about needs, she decides to try. But she does it secretly because a woman in her condition, who voluntarily and publicly used to touch a man, was put to death because of having made him unclean. Then, having heard about Jesus, she knew this unique kind of love that doesn’t exclude, a God who only cares about people needs.

“*She came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak*”. Here the woman, according to the Book of Leviticus – the Word of God – accomplishes an infringement, a sort of sacrilege.

Jesus feels that *"power had gone out from him"*, a vital power, and asks *"Who touched my clothes?"* The attitude of disciples is that of considering Jesus a sort of an irresponsible. They reply *"You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'"* What does the evangelist mean by that? Disciples are by Jesus side, but are not close to him; they go with him but don't follow him. Staying by Jesus is not enough in order to perceive and receive his vital power.

But Jesus looks *"around to see who had done it"*. And the woman, *"trembling with fear"...* Why is she frightened? Because she accomplished an infringement that provides for death and is expecting a reproach, a punishment on behalf of the Lord.

"She came and fell at his feet and, told him the whole truth". Well, what religion considers a sacrilege, is not the same for Jesus ... *"He said to her, 'Daughter, - the same word used for the daughter of the synagogue ruler as per indicating the people of Israel – 'your faith has healed you!'"*

Her faith? How comes? She broke a religious precept: what religion considers a sacrilege and an infringement is considered a faith act by Jesus, instead. God is not a reward for a good behavior; he is a gift. A reward depends upon the one who receives it, a gift simply depends upon the generosity of the donor. No one can feel excluded from the Lord.

And that's not enough. Jesus doesn't urge her to go to the Temple to offer the two pigeons, as Law prescribed, but says, *"Go in peace"*, *"Go towards happiness"*, instead.

A new time began, one in which man doesn't need to make offerings any longer, but only needs to welcome God who is donating himself to him in order to make his life full and happy.