

A Woman and a Girl
(From Today's Gospel: Matt. 9:18-26)

18 While [Jesus] spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live. 19 And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples. 20 And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment: 21 For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole. 22 But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour. 23 And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise, 24 He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. 25 But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose. 26 And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land.

When we read the Bible, and most especially the Gospels, which are accounts of events in Jesus' life and ministry, we must do our best through the power of imagination to make ourselves onlookers, and try any way we can to transport ourselves directly into the midst of these scenes. We need to see the sights, smell the smells, feel the emotions of the moment, as is if we were living participants. The Scriptures themselves are deliberately discreet. Unlike modern accounts, they offer no gratuitous details for the purpose of sensationalism. Rather, they are starkly objective, and allow the reader, with the help of prayer and meditation, to draw his own conclusions. As we exercise our faculties in drawing from the Bible its fullest benefits, we will discover that we can dispense with gadgetry and come to grips with God's Word on our own.

Today's text is filled with pathos. We do well to attempt to empathize with its principal figures: Jesus, as He is besieged with human need; a father desperately concerned about a daughter near death; a chronically ill woman searching for a cure; the crowds, uncertain and unpredictable as they react to Christ's teaching and miracles; the disciples, always on a very painful learning curve. There are three different parallel versions of this story in the Gospels (Mark 5:21-43, Luke 8:40-56), with details we can glean from each.

We can imagine the anxiety of the father, identified as Jairus, a synagogue ruler. In Mark he calls his child *my little daughter*, and in Luke she is described as *his only daughter, about twelve years of age*. What pride he must have had in her, what affection and hopes must have been bound up in her! It has been said "when a child dies, one's future dies". He casts himself at the feet of Jesus, who without delay *arose and followed him*.

Let's move out into the streets with them. The famous Rabbi, accompanied by His disciples, trying to make his way quickly through the city to the house of this distraught and weeping parent, is besieged by the curious and fascinated. In the midst of this urgent mission a significant and utterly unexpected delay arises. It's almost as if a doctor, on a life and death mission, for which every moment counts, is obliged to come to a complete stop. The mere faith-filled hopes

of a suffering woman, hopes not even expressed out loud in the din and confusion of the scene, have brought the Lord of the Universe to a halt: *If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.* Can you hear her womanly agony? St. Mark writes: *she had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse (5:26).* Having had *an issue of blood for twelve years*, she was afflicted not only with the condition itself, but with its embarrassment, and with the stigma of ceremonial uncleanness that such a physical state imposed upon her by Old Testament law (see Lev. 15:25).

In the midst of a terribly public context, she is seeking a very personal cure. Her faith in the Lord is extraordinary, and for it she will receive not only her heart's desire, but a personal commendation from Christ Himself. Mark goes into greater detail:

And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague. And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes? And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague (5:29-34).

We see the crowd draw back, as they behold the searching expression on the Lord's face and sense that something very unusual has occurred. A silence descends, and a space is made in their midst for the one among them who has so abruptly altered the course of things to come forward. Joyful, relieved, yet in fear of the sheer magnitude of what has happened to her, she confesses what she has done, and receives His blessing.

But the grief-stricken father is still standing by with his needs still unaddressed. And Jesus and His disciples must move on in their intended mission. The parallel accounts represent the daughter as having been near death, in contrast to today's text. Perhaps the delay caused by the healing of the woman has also provided the few minutes during which the child passed from life to death. The Lord and His disciples approach a scene that is filled with all of death's dread implications. And it is the death of a little one, a lovely, innocent face permanently consigned to a fading memory, the delightful melody of a daughter's voice never to grace ones home again.

There is an almost cynical finality to the words of those who come to greet Jairus. Quoting from Mark: *Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further? (5:35).* Their dismissive comment reveals that they have no faith in Jesus, and, had not the Lord intervened to encourage him, Jairus might well have sent Jesus and the disciples away in response: *Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole (Lk. 8:50b).* The picture is chaotic and raucous, as a crowd of hired mourners are gathered around to lament the girl's passing. Death always carries with it that sense of a completely disordering event that is unfairly compelled upon us... until the One who is Lord of both life and death appears.

Give place (get out!) : for the maid is not dead , but sleepeth . And they laughed him to scorn. Why? They knew she was dead. Stone, cold dead. It would have been nice if they had hidden their scorn even for the sake of the grieving family (Lk. 8:56). But Jesus ignores them, brushing by, and together with three of His closest disciples and the child's parents, prepares an atmosphere of holy privacy, in such contrast to the open streets and the public healing He has just brought to pass.

St. Mark here records the event in intimate terms:

But when he had put them all out , he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying . And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is , being interpreted , Damsel, I say unto thee, arise . And straightway the damsel arose , and walked ; for she was of the age of twelve years. (5:40-42).

Given the circumstances — a death absolutely and incontrovertibly confirmed— the mother and father, Mark tells us, were *astonished with a great astonishment*. There might have been even a small hope of recovery if their child had been yet on the verge of death, but that chance had been dismissed, but for the presence and power of the Lord. How often would this very same miracle be repeated during His ministry in other situations, and how graphically was it demonstrated finally in His own crucifixion, death, and resurrection!

A woman and a girl. All of the elements of life in this world. The shackle of an illness apparently without cure. A family anticipating the loss of one they cannot bear being without. The milling throng, caught up in the moment, oblivious to the personal crises that may be underway in its midst. The disciples, as close to Christ as any upon earth would ever be, but yet struggling to understand His ways. And the Lord, ever called upon, always needed, never saying “no” to any, except those who approached Him in pride and hypocrisy.

And what about you and me, for we all have our stories. To us He declares, as we struggle with our own desperations, be they on a very different level:

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden , and I will give you rest . Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matt. 11:28-30)

And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. (Mt. 28:20)

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth , give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled , neither let it be afraid . (Jn. 14:27)

As we strive in the midst of our own afflictions to *touch the hem of his garment* through the sacraments, through prayer, through fellowship, and through His Word, we too, in God's time, will receive what we have so earnestly needed and sought for. The same Lord Jesus Christ will arise, and hasten His way toward us.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.