

Year B Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
June 28, 2009
Wis 1:13-15; 2:23-24; Ps 30; 2 Cor 8:7, 9, 13-15; Mk 5:21-43

It would be inadvisable to remove from today's gospel the story of the woman with the blood flow to save a little time, or worse, because it seems to complicate things for an audience that cannot handle too much of the Bible (!) at one sitting. In fact, our evangelist has carefully and with great purpose interwoven two related episodes in what scholars call "dove-tailing" or "sandwiching." Like the before and after parts of the fig tree episode in Mk 11, what Jesus does in the temple coming in-between, the full import and interpretation of these intertwined passages is not possible if we excise part of them.

In our gospel we have two females related by mention of "twelve years": Jairus' daughter is twelve years old, the other woman has been bleeding for twelve years. Most such bleeding was menstrual (see Lv 15:19-31), and it made the woman ritually impure. If her husband were to have marital relations with her, he would be committing a horrible "abomination," and the land would vomit such persons out, Lv 18:19, 24-30! If one interpretation of the phrasing used by Luke in his version of this story is correct, that the woman had been bleeding *since* age twelve (Lk 8:43), she had never had marital relations and was thus childless. Every one died, but for a woman to die childless was the most awful curse. Jephtha's daughter, destined to die because of her father's vow, goes off to mourn not her death but her "virginity" (childlessness), Jgs 11:29-40.

Jairus' twelve year old daughter was childless (she was too young), and if she died, would suffer the same curse. What Jesus does with the two females is tantamount to salvation. He lets the impure bleeding woman touch him (cf. Lv 15:27) and proclaims that her faith has *saved* as well as *healed* her, Mk 5:28-29, 34. Jesus grabs Jairus' daughter and literally says, in Aramaic, "Little lamb, arise!" "Little lamb" is here equivalent to the word used in the Hebrew of Is 40:11, where the divine Good Shepherd will take the "little lambs" in his arms as part of the Good News of the end of Exile.

One last link: Mk 5:29 in Greek literally says that "the fountain of her blood" was dried up, using the same expression as Lv 12:7 (in Greek). This regards women when they give birth, perhaps hinting that it will finally happen here!