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## Arise, Live and Love Again!

### Biblical Reflection for 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time B

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TORONTO, JUNE 24, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://zenit.org)).- Last week we witnessed Jesus' divine power at work on the forces of nature (Mark 4:37-41). Today's Gospel stories reveal his power over disease and death.

In these powerful accounts, Jesus reminds us of the importance of faith. Nothing is possible without faith. On the way to Jairus' house (Mark 5), Jesus encounters interruptions, delays, and even obstacles along the road. The people in the passage transfer their uncleanness to Jesus, and to each Jesus bestows the cleansing wholeness of God. Let us consider for a moment each situation.

#### The hemorrhaging woman

Jesus' miraculous healing of this woman who had been hemorrhaging for 12 years is narrated in three of the four Gospels (Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48). The law regarded three forms of uncleanness as serious enough to exclude the infected person from society: leprosy, uncleanness caused by bodily discharges, and impurity resulting from contact with the dead (Numbers 5:2-4). The woman in Mark 5 had a disease that made her ritually unclean (Leviticus 15:25-27). It would have excluded her from most social contact and worship at the temple. She desperately wanted Jesus to heal her, but she knew that her bleeding would cause Jesus to become ritually unclean under Jewish law.

Anyone who had one of the diseases was made unclean. Anything or anyone that one touched became unclean. Those who were unclean also suffered from estranged relationships with others and with God. Anything unclean was unfit or unworthy to be in the presence of a God who was holy. Those deemed unclean had to go through a rite of purification or cleansing in order to be welcomed back into society and into the presence of God.

The woman's bold invasion of Jesus' space, and her touching of Jesus' garment, thus making Jesus unclean, could have put him off. On the contrary, Jesus not only heals the woman, but also restores her relationships with others. When Jesus calls the woman "daughter," he established a relationship with one with whom he should not have a relationship.

#### Jairus' daughter

The very touching story of Jairus' daughter is "sandwiched" in the story about the hemorrhaging woman. Jairus was an elected leader of the local synagogue, responsible for supervising the weekly worship, operating the school, and caring for the building. Some synagogue leaders had been pressured not to support Jesus, but Jairus had not caved into that pressure. Jairus bowed before Jesus and uttered his anguished request for help: "My daughter is at the point of death. Please, come lay your hands on her that she may get well and live." Jairus' gesture was a significant and daring act of respect and worship.

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The story continues: "Jesus took the child by the hand, and said to her, 'Talitha koum,' which means, 'Little girl, I say to you, arise!' The girl arose immediately and walked around" (5:41-42). By calling her "little girl," he established the same kind of relationship with her as Jairus has with his daughter.

In each situation, Jesus' holiness transforms the person's uncleanness. The flow of blood is stopped. The woman is healed. The corpse comes back to life. The young girl gets out of bed. Jesus raises each person up to his level, making that individual worthy to be in the presence of God.

Jesus, the healer

In so many of the healing stories, Jesus manifests the power to give people health, healing and even to bring the dead back to life. Remember the young man of Nain in Luke 7 who had died. Jesus said, "Young man, I tell you, arise!" Luke reports that the "dead man sat up and began to speak."

Jesus responded to the cries of the leper who begged him, "If you will, you can cure me!" Moved with compassion, Jesus gave a word of command which was proper to God and not to a mere human being: "I do will it. Be made clean!" Mark wrote: "The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean" (Mark 1:42). How can we forget the case of the paralytic who was let down through an opening made in the roof of the house, Jesus said, "I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home" (cf. Mk 2:1-12).

Jesus' story continues in the Acts of the Apostles when we hear about people who "carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and mats so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them" (Acts 5:15). These "wonders and signs" were performed by the apostles not in their own name, but in the name of Jesus Christ, and were therefore a further proof of his divine power.

"Talitha koum"

The story of Jairus' daughter not only speaks about the death of a child and the raising of that young girl back to life, but it also speaks about death of the heart and spirit, a disease that affects so many young people today.

Those powerful words -- "Talitha koum" (Little girl, arise) -- are not only addressed to this little girl in Mark's story, but also to many young people, perhaps to each one of us. How many young children live with fear and sadness because of divided family situations, tragedy and loss! How many young people are caught up in vicious cycles of death: drugs, abortion, pornography, violence, gangs and suicide.

Today our young people are afflicted with anxiety, discouragement and other serious psychological and even physical illnesses in alarming ways. Many don't know what joy, love hope and truth really mean any more.

Sadness, pessimism, cynicism, meaninglessness, the desire not to live, are always bad things, but when we see or hear young people express them, our hearts are even more heavy and sad. Living in a big city such as Toronto, I have the opportunity of meeting many young people, and when I hear some of their stories of brokenness, sadness and despair, I realize how much work the churches must do to bring young people back to life.

Jesus continues today to resurrect those dead young people to life. He does so with his word, and also by sending them his disciples who, in his name, and with his very love, repeat to today's young people his cry: "Talitha koum," "young man, young woman, arise! Live again! Love again! You are loved!"

"Alive" in Darlinghurst

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As I reflect on today's Gospel and Jesus' powerful words: "Talitha koum," I recall vividly one of Benedict XVI's special moments during last July's World Youth Day 2008 in Australia.

The Holy Father went to the University of Notre Dame's Sacred Heart chapel in Darlinghurst (Sydney) where he met young people with histories of drug addiction and other problems, who are following the "Alive" rehabilitation program. The Pope recalled Moses' words in the Old Testament: "I set before you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live in the love of the Lord your God, [...] for in this your life consists."

"It was clear what they had to do," the Pope explained, "they had to turn away from other gods and worship the true God Who had revealed himself to Moses -- and they had to obey His commandments. You might think that in today's world, people are unlikely to start worshipping other gods. But sometimes people worship 'other gods' without realizing it. False 'gods' [...] are nearly always associated with the worship of three things: material possessions, possessive love, or power."

"Authentic love is obviously something good," the Pope continued. "When we love, we become most fully ourselves, most fully human. But [...] people often think they are being loving when actually they are being possessive or manipulative. People sometimes treat others as objects to satisfy their own needs. [...] How easy it is to be deceived by the many voices in our society that advocate a permissive approach to sexuality, without regard for modesty, self-respect or the moral values that bring quality to human relationships!"

"Dear friends, I see you as ambassadors of hope to others in similar situations. You can convince them of the need to choose the path of life and shun the path of death, because you speak from experience. All through the Gospels, it was those who had taken wrong turnings who were particularly loved by Jesus, because once they recognized their mistake, they were all the more open to his healing message.

"Indeed, Jesus was often criticized by self-righteous members of society for spending so much time with such people. 'Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?' they asked. He responded: 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick ... I did not come to call the virtuous but sinners' (cf. Mt 9:11-13).

"It was those who were willing to rebuild their lives who were most ready to listen to Jesus and become his disciples. You can follow in their footsteps, you too can grow particularly close to Jesus because you have chosen to turn back towards him. You can be sure that, just like the Father in the story of the prodigal son, Jesus welcomes you with open arms. He offers you unconditional love -- and it is in loving friendship with him that the fullness of life is to be found."

I am sure that Jesus was smiling upon Benedict XVI and that wonderful gathering in Sydney last July. Jesus' words -- "Talitha koum" -- were heard once again Down Under as the Holy Father invited young people to rise up, to live and to love again.

[The readings for the 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time B are Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24; 2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15; and Mark 5:21-43 or 5:21-24, 35b-43]

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