

TOUCHING AND LIBERATING A SUFFERING WOMAN THROUGH INDIVIDUAL AND/OR COLLECTIVE JUSTICE (MARK 5:21-43)

**A Summary of the homily by Fr. Evangelos Thiani,
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On the occasion of the 2018 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Fr. Evangelos Thiani gave a homily on the reading of the day, (20th of January, Year B.) namely the story of the woman who had suffered from a flow of blood for 12 years and of the 12 year-old daughter of Jairus who was on the verge of death.

In his introduction Fr. Thiani dwelt on the Jewish background with respect to uncleanness restrictions. Both the woman with the flow of blood as well as the family of the young girl (after she died) were subject to these laws. Jews were not to touch or be near menstruating women nor were they to touch the dead if they were not family. Therefore, in the first case the woman was definitely not allowed to be part of a crowd. It took great courage on her part to break this taboo. And Jesus and his companions should not have entered the house of a dead person in the case of Jairus daughter.

Fr. Thiani made a comparison between the two cases, showing the similarities. The woman had a flow of blood for **12** years and the young girl was **12** years old. "Twelve years meant maturity in the Hebrew culture. For after a girl reached twelve years, she was considered an adult ready to be married." Thus in the case of the woman, "her suffering had in other words reached the climax." He also contrasted the two cases: the case of the woman who was totally alone but the girl had family and a community friends to be concerned about her. The woman had "no one to be with her, and as physically weak as she was, she went looking for Christ. She just needed a touch that would heal her, not words, not a ritual or ceremony. She decided that she would do that secretly (Mk 5:28, 32), to probably avoid any public ridicule." Fr. Thiani also pointed out that the mother of the 12-year old is not mentioned except after Jesus comes to the house.

Christ and suffering women

Fr. Thiani referred to the initial mission statement of Jesus in Luke 4: 18 to highlight the good news that He came to bring freedom to the oppressed. He transformed ancient traditions, touched the unclean and went about with women, contrary to the habit of other Rabbis. He called his disciples his 'mother and his brothers' "This is a very unusual statement in the Middle East, just as it would be in Africa, to call men a term used for women. Here Christ somehow liberates the sexes, and no one questions it."

The Church and suffering women

The Church has borrowed from many different cultures, from Middle Eastern, European and African cultures. The Hebrew culture was biased against women and this bias is still there in the church: for example, only religious celibate men can occupy the highest ranking positions in the Orthodox and the Catholic Church.

“All Christians (the baptized) are said by Saint Paul to “have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27) and thus are bearers of Christ (*Christofori*).” They must therefore be concerned with the oppressed and with their suffering as Christ was. Following the example of Christ “the Church is called to review how to handle practices that are demeaning and inhuman, while still avoiding schisms that happen when practices taken as tradition are tampered with.”

Individual and collective responsibility

In this section Fr. Thiani gave examples of suffering women, such as those physically or mentally challenged, women in abusive marriages, women living alone, divorced women, prostitutes. He reminded us that any suffering by a Christian ‘is transferred on the body of Christ, and thus affects the entire Eucharistic community.’ Thus to give solace to an individual Christian is to give peace to the entire Christian body.

Closing words

“As a movement, the ecumenical movement must instill [justice] in each one of our institutions.... It will not be easy, but it is overdue and godly. We must pledge to touch just one suffering woman or girl at a time, individually and/or collectively, and offer the justice of Christ to them.