

When Our Lord said "The girl is not dead but sleepeth" what did He mean? Does not Catholic tradition hold that the child was in fact dead?
 Matt. ix, 24 : Mk. v, 39 : Lk. viii, 52.

Comparing these words of Christ with what He said at the raising of Lazarus (Jn. xi, 11ff.) we notice that on the latter occasion He explained His mention of sleep as describing death. No such explanation is given on the occasion which we are now considering and a few commentators have somewhat precipitately concluded that our Lord really meant sleep in the literal sense and not death. If this were so then the only miracle on this occasion would be one of knowledge of her actual condition. But, as Plummer points out (*St. Luke* in loc.) "the εἰδότες ('knowing') in verse 53 is conclusive as to the Evangelist's meaning: not 'supposing' but 'knowing' she was dead." Unless we are prepared therefore to reject the explicit statement of the Evangelist we can be in no doubt that the girl was in fact dead, and Catholic tradition has always taken it to be so.

It follows then that our Lord uses the word "sleep" in a metaphorical sense. The Greek word used here is καθεύδει. In the account of the raising of Lazarus, the Evangelist uses the verb κείνηται. Death is often described in the Bible as sleep. In Christian times of course the expression is used to imply a belief in the resurrection but the word was used to describe death long before the time of Christ and even before there was any clear idea of a future life. The word used in the Lazarus episode is the one generally met with in the Greek OT to express the same idea, cf. Deut. xxxi, 16 : II Kings vii, 12. The word used in our passage about the daughter of Jairus (καθεύδω) appears to be used in a metaphorical sense in the OT only in Daniel xii, 2, but this text is enough to corroborate its use in that sense in the Gospel.

Why does our Lord describe death as sleep especially without explaining His meaning? The answer is surely that it is a hint that He is about to raise the person to life, just as if it had only been a question of sleep. It is clear from the context in each case that He never intended His remark to be taken literally, though in fact some did. Our Lord made almost a habit of using enigmatic phrases which people would at first misunderstand, no doubt to attract their attention and impress His words and acts on their memory, cf. Mk. viii, 15 : Jn. iv, 10-15, 32.

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Why did not Jesus allay the fear of the people after the miracle of the Gadarene swine, as He usually does in similar circumstances in the Gospel? Are there cases today of possession by evil spirits?

The Synoptic accounts of the miracle tell us that the whole people wanted our Lord to depart from their district and that they were afraid. They feared further manifestations of His miraculous power which