

IF I CAN JUST TOUCH HIS CLOTHES!

(The power to heal is available in the person of Jesus
and accessed through the faith of those who believe.)

“If I can just touch his clothes.” His clothes? “If I can just touch his clothes?” Do we think like that? Do we talk like that to ourselves? Yes. We do. Sometimes. It depends. This woman fascinates me. She has been bleeding for a dozen years. In the story I do not get the sense that she is in the crowd with anybody, that there is anyone who has accompanied her. She is alone. Isolated. Perhaps marginalized. Being sick for a long time can have that effect. It costs you. It costs friendships and relationships. You can’t quite be there for family get-togethers. You begin to live a life of your own. People start to think, “She’s always sick.” Normalcy becomes the thing that is most important to you. You just want to be like other people. You don’t want to be different anymore, especially not because of sickness. You just want to be normal. You hate the sense that “there is something wrong with me.”

But she isn’t normal or even typical. She has been afflicted for as long as the young daughter of Jairus has been alive—twelve years. No doctor could cure her. Her resources are all gone. You just sense the desperation but you also sense that she is down--down on herself, down on life. She doesn’t think she is worth enough to present herself to Jesus, to approach him directly, let alone tell him publicly the nature of her situation, and just precisely what cure she needs, and simply ask for a cure right up front. And yet, she senses that he has the power. She senses that he can cure her if He desires to. We would say today that she suffers from a poor self-image or from low self-esteem. We might even say she is depressed because of her illness.

But there’s more. She’s in the crowd. She’s walking with him. She is almost invisible in the crowd and sometimes in that sense of being invisible we will do things we would never do if the spotlight was upon us. She feels a little bit like she can hide and a little bit like she is safe there—in the crowd--in an ironic sort of way. She doesn’t need to get his attention. She just wants to touch him. Actually not even him, just his clothes. Yes, we do get to thinking like that. Why hasn’t she given up? Why hasn’t she just let herself become bitter and resentful and angry at God for not helping her?

But what’s behind the thinking that if she can just touch his clothes, his ordinary day in, day out clothing, that his clothing will convey his healing power to her? His clothes have no special power. Can something ordinary convey God’s power, God’s healing, God’s grace to us? Could water do that? Or olive oil, or bread, or wine, or simple touch or a human word? Can any of these very ordinary things put us in touch with Jesus and his power and his healing presence and his sustaining love? To me, this woman has made a substantial breakthrough. She believes something that we all have come to believe. At the heart of the sacraments is our faith and an understanding that the very ordinary is able to channel the very powerful grace of God when that ordinary reality is in touch with Jesus and when you and I believe it to be possible. Believe it to be real.

How does this happen? How can this be? Come with me for a moment to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus in Gethsemane is at the end of his life on earth, and is pouring out his own heart to his Father. He has spent his entire public ministry healing others, helping others, reaching out to others, praying for others. This is his one moment when his own need is so deep and so real. In this moment he is just like us at times and he beseeches assistance just as we do. He asks his apostles to

accompany him. He asks Peter, James and John to come apart and pray with him. And then he prays to his Father. "Father, take this cup away from me." There is a certain desperation to this prayer too. He is not asking as much as he is begging, like the father in the story begs for the life of his daughter. And the Father in heaven? Is silent. And. Jesus. Dies. He not only dies. He dies horribly and terribly and rejected and betrayed. And in that moment Jesus learns something about human beings. He learns how hard it is to continue to trust in a world afflicted with sin and sickness, suffering and death. He learns how hard it is to trust once trust has been broken, once death has entered the picture through "the envy of the devil" as Wisdom so trenchantly puts it.

There is no miracle for Jesus there on that cross either. But then, there is the miracle. On Sunday he rises from the dead. He lives. He is now full of life. Nevermore to die. The miracle of ultimate life has taken hold of him. And in that moment we all get a miracle. The ordinariness of life has now been supercharged with the transforming power of the grace of Jesus Christ. Ordinary realities of water, bread and wine, oil and word and touch can now bring the superabundant power of Jesus Christ to bear in our lives in this valley of tears. And by means of our faith in Jesus Christ we can all access that miracle of life and realize that sickness and suffering and death are often enough part of this broken world but not for life in the Kingdom of God. We too get our miracle but like Christ we too sometimes have to suffer and to die first. By believing--despite all these things--we become rich, making God's richness our own. In the end we are saved by the love of God—alone. Jairus' daughter tasted the victory. So did that woman who never gave up. So do we when we step out in faith and receive the sacraments that enable us to reach out and touch him, or at least his clothes.

May the Lord bless all this day and give us his peace.