

MIDWEEK LAETARE

Text: Revelation 22:1-5; St. Mark 5:25-34; St. Luke 23:1-25

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

In each of the Gospel accounts as recorded by Saints Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we read of a woman who, for twelve years, suffered from a flow of blood, and of how, in fear, she crept up behind JESUS in a jostling crowd. The last thing she wanted to do was to draw attention to herself. She had heard all about JESUS and she thought that if only she could reach out and touch the hem of His garment everything would change for her.

She had spent a fortune on doctors, but nothing had worked. In fact, she was the worse for it. But now JESUS was here. He was almost within her grasp. It was the opportunity of a life-time. So, she reached out and touched His garment. She reached out with nothing but an empty hand, longing to receive healing from the only One who could truly heal her affliction. As she touched Him, He felt power leave Him, and He turned around to find her.

“Who touched My clothes?” JESUS asked. His disciples probably looked at Him as though He been in the sun a bit too long. He was surrounded by people who were touching Him, bustling up against Him, crowding Him and jostling Him. What could JESUS mean *“Who touched My clothes?”*

The woman knew. She knew exactly what JESUS meant. Not only had He felt the power depart from Him, but she had felt that power enter her and bring healing to the infirmity she had borne for twelve long years. Tremblingly with fear, she knelt before JESUS and confessed to Him the whole truth. Then, JESUS calmed her fear and blessed her: *“Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction.”*

It seems that with JESUS there is always a crowd. There are always those who are bumping up against Him, rubbing shoulders with Him, touching Him. But many of them walk away from the encounter no better for the experience. They may rub up against JESUS, but their conditions do not improve; they touch JESUS, but they do not touch Him in faith.

It is no different today. There are many who attend worship services every LORD’s Day, but they do not really expect to receive anything from JESUS. As a consequence, they receive exactly what they are expecting: absolutely nothing. But those who touch JESUS in faith, who come to Him with trembling hands opened to receive what He would give, even if only crumbs from under their Master’s table, these never walk away empty. They discover *“the power within Him dwelling.”* (TLH 305:5)

In our first reading, this evening, we heard of the River of Life, flowing from the very throne of God and the Lamb, and we heard of the Tree of Life, whose leaves bring healing to the

nations. In our Passion reading, that Tree is about to be planted. Pilate hands JESUS over to be crucified, to be nailed to the Cross, a Tree that would then be planted on the stony crest of Golgotha, the place of the skull, lifting JESUS from the earth.

JESUS had once likened His being lifted on the Cross to what happened to the Israelites when they were being attacked by the fiery serpents in the wilderness. Do you recall that account?

It was the same old, same old—the people grumbling—again. They were not happy with God and His servant Moses. They complained about the way Moses was leading them, and they complained about the bread God had given them to eat. In response to their complaining, the LORD gave them something to really complain about—the sting of fiery serpents whose venomous bite brought the sting of death.

In their terror the people repented and turned to Moses, pleading with him to intercede with the LORD God for them. Moses turned to God and God told him to do the strangest thing. Moses was to make a bronze image of the thing that was stinging them and killing them, and lift it up on a pole for all to see. Then, God promised, if anyone should look up at the snake on the pole, the snake bite would not harm him and he or she would not die, but live.

JESUS said that He would be lifted up in the same way, so that, nailed to a tree and lifted high, any who were suffering from the bite of sin that leads to death, might look up and see Him, and seeing Him, be released from death and its sting, the result of sin. That is, His Cross would become for us the Tree of Life! For if we look up to Him upon that Tree believing that He died for us, we shall not die, but live.

The death His Cross rescues us from is not temporal death—the death that does not last. JESUS' Cross rescues us from permanent death; the eternal death of Hell itself!

Therefore, the Tree of the Cross bears Fruit, and in its Fruit is healing for the life of the world. What is the Fruit that hangs upon the Cross if it is not the Body of the LORD JESUS? What is the nectar of that Fruit if it is not His life-giving Blood? This precious Fruit hangs upon the Tree of the Cross to provide us with nothing less than the Medicine of Immortality. In the LORD's Supper, JESUS sets His table with the Fruit of that Tree for us to eat and to drink—His very Body and very Blood.

The first century Bishop, St. Ignatius of Antioch, writing to the Christians in Ephesus, put it this way when he spoke of the mystery of Christ's Holy Supper: *“share in the one common breaking of the Bread—the Medicine of Immortality, and the sovereign Remedy by which we escape death, and live in JESUS CHRIST forevermore.”* (Epistle to the Ephesians, 21)

Following the same line of thought, Martin Luther writes in his Large Catechism: *“We must never regard the Sacrament as a harmful thing from which we should flee, but as a pure, wholesome, soothing Medicine that aids you and gives life in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body is helped as well!”* (LC V:68)

Still, one must take care how one receives this healing Medicine! For as reckless as it would be for people to graze through a pharmacy, sampling this and that, and imagining that no harm will come to them, so is it with this Holy Remedy. It is indeed powerful to give eternal life, but as we are warned by St. Paul in his first epistle to the Christians in Corinth, when the Eucharist, that is Holy Communion, is misused, the result is deadly. It is for this reason that our Church practices closed Communion; it is the only responsible thing to do with such powerful Medicine as this!

So how is this Holy Remedy to be used correctly?

Here, we go back to where we began this evening, to the woman who touched JESUS, and in faith, expected to receive healing from Him.

We use the Supper correctly when we use it in faith, when we approach our SAVIOR in this Blessed Sacrament, believing that in it, He gives to us exactly what He has promised to give—the very same Body He offered up to His Father and ours as a sweet-smelling sacrifice in our place, and the very same Blood which stained the wood of His Cross and poured into the rocky soil of Golgotha to cover the sins of the world. For JESUS said, *“Take, eat, this is My Body which is given for you... Take, drink, this Cup is the New Testament in My Blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”*

Therefore, in receiving this Holy Remedy in faith, we receive healing—true and lasting healing. We receive nothing less than the complete remission of our sins and the promise of deliverance from eternal death and Hell itself!

The sainted Dr. Martin Luther once said that if there were a doctor who had a medicine that could keep people alive forever, every last one of us would be knocking down his door and offering everything we owned just to get even a small taste of that medicine. Here in the Eucharist, the LORD JESUS offers us that very thing, and He offers it freely—without charge, without price. It comes as a pure gift. It is the Medicine of Immortality!

Well, then, did the hymn-writer sing:

*Far beyond all human telling
Is the power within Him dwelling.* (TLH 305:5)

We do not have to be fearful. We do not have to creep up on JESUS hoping that we will not be noticed as we touch the hem of His garment. JESUS, Himself, bids us come and dine with Him at His Feast where He is the Host and Servant, indeed, the very Meal itself! Here, He calls you to receive Him in faith and hear Him say, *“Take eat... My Body... given for you. Take drink... My Blood... shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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