

11-17-19 Be of Good Cheer Your Faith Has Made You Well

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This past Thursday evening we had the memorial service for Father John of Blessed Memory. It rained just enough to wet everything down. Father Thaddeus told of how Father John loved the first rain of the season, how it settled the dust and washed the trees. I had the thought that, in a sense, it's like the Advent fast that has just started. This is a time for us to wash off the carelessness that creeps into our spiritual lives. It is a time for us to recommit to saying our prayer rule or to say it with more attention. It is a time to contemplate our own spiritual condition, the time to be spiritually refreshed, the time to begin to look forward to the great celebration of the Nativity of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ.

We have, in today's Gospel, two stories. There is the story of the woman with the issue of blood for 12 years. In Jewish society time, a woman was considered to be unclean and defiled because of this ongoing hemorrhage. She could not go into holy places or touch holy things because of this issue of blood. We also have the story of Jairus who was a ruler of the synagogue, a very important man with authority and prestige. He had a 12-year-old-daughter, and the Scripture tells us that she was his only daughter and that she was dying.

The woman and the daughter have in common 12 years. The daughter of the ruler was 12 years old. The woman with the hemorrhage was in her 12th year of suffering. Both are in need of that which seems impossible for them to obtain. The woman had already spent all of her money on physicians hoping for a cure yet to no avail. Year after year, she suffered. She remained unclean, defiled. The flow of blood would not stop. In certain circumstances, she was an outcast not being allowed to participate in religious and many social affairs.

We read that she was in a large crowd of people. She must have heard that this man, Jesus, was healing all sorts of diseases. Perhaps she had heard of his teaching, and his message ran deeply true into her soul. By now, many have heard of the miracles that Jesus was performing. Just a short time earlier when John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus to ask him, "Are you the one, the coming one?" Jesus told them, "Go tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind see. The lame walk. The lepers are cleansed. The deaf hear. The dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."

Perhaps this poor woman had heard the gospel, and she believed. We simply don't know all the details, yet something gave her great faith that Jesus could help her. It took boldness for her to appear in public and no less in the presence of the ruler of the synagogue. If she were exposed in her uncleanness, she would be subject to ridicule and punishment. I do not believe this boldness stemmed from simply hearing that Jesus had healed others. She had spent all her money for 12 long years trying to get healing. It's not likely that she would risk such great humiliation to approach Jesus unless something much more profound had penetrated deep into her soul, something that gave her great faith.

I was reminded of Father Seraphim Rose of Blessed Memory. He was a gifted scholar, a brilliant man. He had rejected the Christian faith that he had been presented in his youth. He regularly walked past the old Russian Cathedral in San Francisco and, one day, he decided to walk in. Standing there in the presence of the holy icons, he believed that he had found the ultimate truth. It was not an intellectual

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realization but an experience of the heart deep in the soul where Christ speaks to those who are honest and sincere enough to listen.

Perhaps this woman had a similar experience leading her to great faith. She approaches Jesus from behind, discreetly, hoping not to be noticed, believing that simply to touch the outer edge of Christ's garment would be enough and she would be healed, and so she was. Immediately, she feels within her body the hemorrhage has stopped. She is healed and she knows it. Still not wishing to be exposed, she remains silent, but Jesus, knowing that divine power had proceeded forth from him, calls out, "Who touched me?"

Saint Ephrem the Syrian says that it was fitting that this woman's faith, which shown so brightly in her hidden agony, should be publicly crowned. When Christ calls out, "Who touched me?" the woman realizes she cannot hide. She comes forward, reveals everything to the Lord before the whole crowd, in front of the ruler of the synagogue. She hides nothing. Instead of the scorn she feared from the Jews, she is honored for her faith. Christ says to her, "Daughter..." He calls her daughter, "Be of good cheer. Your faith has made you well. Go in peace."

Much like this woman that Jesus healed, we also don't know very much about the ruler of the synagogue. Obviously, he knew something about Jesus. Being himself a man in authority, he may have already heard of the hostility towards Jesus by the scribes and Pharisees in Jerusalem. It's very likely that he knew that Jesus had healed the servant of the centurion soldier, a man who was highly respected by the Jews that had built them a synagogue.

Jesus and his disciples had just returned from the land of the Gadarenes where he had cast out the demons and the demoniac. Reading from the Gospel of Luke, "So it was, when Jesus returned, that the multitudes welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. And behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was the ruler of the synagogue, and he fell down at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter about 12 years of age, and she was dying."

Whatever the ruler of the synagogue and had heard about Jesus, whatever questions he may have had, I believe the one and only thing in his mind this day was that his daughter was dying. I doubt that he was thinking about his rank, his position, what it would look like to others, what the scribes and the Pharisees in Jerusalem would think of him. Not at all. Instead, he fell down in humility. He fell down in humility at the feet of Jesus and begged him to come to his house.

Jesus feels compassion for him and immediately sets off with him, but they don't get very far. They don't get very far. A woman touches Jesus' garment, and Jesus stops and says, "Who touched me?" Perhaps the father of the dying girl was annoyed that they were being delayed. His daughter was dying, and someone was hindering their journey. Again, from the Gospel of Luke, "While he was still speaking, someone came from the ruler of the synagogue's house saying to him, 'Your daughter is dead. Do not trouble the teacher.'"

Before the father of the girl had time to react, before his great sorrow overwhelmed him, Jesus says to him, "Do not be afraid. Only believe, and she will be made well." The father had just been informed that his daughter had died, but he had also just witnessed the healing of a woman that had secretly touched

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the hem of his garment and been made well. He witnessed the miracle by which Christ exposed her faith, that he mystically knew that power had gone out from him. He had heard the Lord tell this woman, "Be of good cheer. Your faith has made you well. Go in peace."

When the Lord turned to him and said, "Do not be afraid. Only believe, and she will be made well," Christ gave him the hope that he so desperately needed. Verse 51: "When he came into the house, he permitted no one to come in except Peter, James and John, and the father and mother of the girl. Now, all wept and mourned for her, but he said, "Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping," and they ridiculed him. They ridiculed him knowing that she was dead.

Notice how Christ forces the mourners to reaffirm that she is dead. They know for a fact that she is dead. They have looked upon her dead body. They are eyewitnesses. They have observed that she no longer breathes, that her body no longer moves, that she grows cold. They ridicule Christ for saying that she is only sleeping, but he put them all outside, took her by the hand and called saying, "Little girl, arise." Then her spirit returned, and she rose immediately, and he commanded that she be given something to eat. Her parents were astonished, but he charged them to tell no one what had happened.

As I have said on multiple occasions, whenever I read of some great miracle that the Lord has done and then tells the person not to tell anybody about it, I kind of chuckle inside. No one is ever obedient to the Lord in this regard. They go out and immediately tell everybody what the Lord has done for them. How could they be silent? They're overwhelmed with joy. Their only daughter had died. Then Christ commands her to arise, and her spirit returns, and she gets up well and fully alive. It was too much for them to remain silent. Their grief had been replaced with joy.

We too have been raised from the dead in our baptism. Christ has come to rescue us from death. How can we be silent? How can we not be grateful? The most powerful witness that we have that we belong to Christ is the life that we choose to live. I suspect that there are times in our lives when we feel that we are insignificant in the salvation of our country, our community, our neighbor, even in our own families. This, of course, is not true. We are all important. We are all significant in the salvation of our fellow man.

You remember the story in the Old Testament when Abraham was negotiating with God to spare Sodom from destruction. He asked God if he would spare the city if they could find 50 righteous men, and God agrees to spare the city for 50 righteous. Then Abraham goes back and says, "Would you spare it for five less than 50?" And so God agrees to spare it for 45. Abraham continues to negotiate and says he gets the Lord all the way down to 10, "If we can find 10 righteous, will you spare the city?" God agrees to spare the city for 10 righteous.

We see that in a city full of wickedness and sin, that for the sake of 10 righteous and Abraham's requests, the Lord consents to spare the entire city, not just the 10 but all of the city. Unfortunately, they were not even able to find 10 righteous. The point is that, for the sake of a few righteous, God has mercy on many, so it falls to each one of us personally and to all of us corporately as the Church to commit our life to Christ and his holy church not just for our salvation but for the well-being of all of humanity.

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Of course, we did this at our baptism. Remember the words of the baptismal service. Remember the commitment we made. Remember the allegiance we proclaimed. "Do you join Christ?" "I join him. I do join him." "Have you joined Christ?" "I have joined him." "Do you believe in him?" "I believe in him as king and as God." We are given the grace to enter into the spiritual warfare, and the struggle does come into our lives. What do we do with all the passions of our past life that try to force their way back into our life?

Everyone who desires to follow Christ will have to struggle. We have said it many times. The Christian life is a struggle. The right struggle, for sure, but a struggle, nonetheless. Everyone's struggle is unique, and, at the same time, everyone's struggle is the same. It is unique to each one of us according to the life that we have come from. It is unique according to the passions that we embraced in the world, but we also see that everyone's struggle is the same. It is the same in that we all struggle with self-will. It is always a struggle between our will and God's will. Do we want God's will in our life, or do we insist upon our own will? Whatever manner our struggle manifests itself, it is still a struggle and a battle of the will.

The Holy Fathers say we must begin, little by little, learning to deny ourselves. This is part of the fast. We are learning to deny our will. The stomach insists on being satisfied. The stomach insists on being satisfied, and we deny it that satisfaction. Little by little, the voices, the loud voices of the passions begin to be silenced, and we begin to hear, more clearly, the voice of God.

May God grant us the faith of the woman with the issue of blood to reach out and touch the hem of Christ's garment and the hope of the ruler of the synagogue that Christ will come and heal our souls. May this Advent fast bring us victory in our struggle to be worthy, to be worthy to be called a Christian.

Amen.