

## Pentecost, 6B

Readings, 2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27, Psalm 130, 2 Corinthians 8: 7-15, Mark 5: 21-43

### Faith from the Inside

#### Introduction

Last week, I set the scene for today and for the coming weeks. My contention was this: that despite the view that we moderns have of ourselves, that we are more sophisticated, more learned, more knowledgeable than those who have preceded us: such a claim is doubtful. I suggested, that while we have much greater awareness with regard to things scientific, we have allowed that knowledge to blind us to what I call the "depth of the world". I suggested, that our confidence in "what you see is what there is" ... indeed "all there is" - the science of the empirical, of verifiability - has led us to mistakenly see reality in a shallow way: one dimensionally. In contrast to our one-dimensional world view, I added that the ancients dug deeper. I suggested that they looked beyond appearances, they understood that reality is not neutral, that human beings are buffeted by reversal, by powers that mysteriously break out from no-where, accosting us: powers from nature such as illness, powers of a social character that break upon us, that wreak havoc and violence: the political, the economic, the religious. This, the ancients saw, this the ancients were acutely aware of, and they used the language about demons to explain it.

#### The Bleeding Woman: Reading Reality Deeply

And so to the story of the Bleeding Woman. There is here a double dimension to this woman's experience. Here, there is the demonic reality of illness, the inexplicable experience of constantly haemorrhaging, of fistula - a condition still common among women in the developing world. Here, it is about the power of nature, which turns upon her. But then, there is also the demonic reality of rejection, of exclusion: perhaps the greatest pain of all. This is not due to nature, however, but reflects the human predilection for scapegoating, in this case expressed through the religious: Judaism's casting of her as "impure", as sullied, as dirty. The one who is an aberration is also persecuted.

What equally stands out in the account, however are two more things. In this woman, you see the determination to respond to her condition and social rejection. Firstly, she refuses to accept this situation as inevitable, she refuses to resign herself to it: this, despite what she was probably told, that it was "God's will". In our story, her stubborn perseverance is underscored dramatically in the participles that Mark uses: *having heard about Jesus, having gone into the crowd...* and then we get the final verb, the verb of faith, that verb that promises to free her once and for all in one act... *she grabbed his garment from behind; "apto" ... meaning, adhering to it, sticking to it like velcro, never letting go.* But there is something crucial here that we need to add - and this is the second point - this woman, courageously, daringly, *rejects her rejection* by Jewish religious doctrine, by the Temple. This woman courageously and spiritedly challenges the religious theological construct of "impure" which vilifies her.

#### Some Thinking

What may we draw from this gut-wrenching plucky account about this woman's faith, in Jesus Christ? *The first insight is that Christian faith is a verb, a doing, an action* which bends toward freedom. Christian faith, properly understood, liberates people, from their psychological and physical prisons, from their social, political and religious rejection. *The second insight is that Christian faith is about the perception of God not through books, nor tradition, nor doctrine, nor rules, but through the personal experience of God, through the heart (cognitio Dei experimentalis).* This is dynamite, this is what the woman does: she

challenges the whole weight of Judaism, of the received tradition, and dares to believe otherwise, trusting in her experience of God in Jesus.

May I end with an observation and it is this: Christians often mistake faith *for* its contents. I have spent years reading and writing about Christian faith and have become relatively erudite when it comes to Christian learning. But theological tradition and doctrinal content **is not faith; it is only learning about the faith**. Mistaking the contents of Christian faith for Christian faith itself, mistaking learning for the actual lived-out, heart-felt life of faith, fools us, deludes us into a narrow confidence about the certainty of our faith interpretation and views. The French Catholic philosopher Maurice Blondel, put it this way when referring to the Christian bishops and church leaders of his time, people of great erudition and learning, people of the tradition “these people see too clearly to see properly”.

What a wonderful woman! What a wonderful woman! Faith heart-lived! Faith, the personal experience of God that broke all the rules.