

**Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B
(July 2, 2006)**

Who Touched Me?

“Who touched me?” A question the disciples found startling, perhaps even silly with all the people crowding around him. And surely it wasn’t the first time he had been in a jostling crowd that made it difficult for him to move or preach or heal. To heal – that’s what it was really all about. It was about the healing touch of Jesus – and, it seems to me, it was about faith, the faith of Jairus who came forward and threw himself at the feet of Jesus, and the faith of the woman who was no less bold in touching him, an act that was forbidden to her in her condition, to say nothing of the custom prohibiting a woman from approaching a man she did not know.

It almost seems as though Jesus can’t resist that faith, and we see the same thing repeated over and over again in the Gospels. In response to a cry for help, he reaches out and touches, and his touch not only brings healing it brings life as well. Think of the dead twelve-year-old in today’s Gospel. Think too of Peter’s fevered mother-in-law; a leper, blind men, a deaf man with a speech defect, the high priest’s slave whose ear Peter had cut off.

He not only touched others. He allowed them to touch him as well. The woman we heard about just now, the sick at Gennesaret, the crowds, the penitent woman who washed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. He even invited Thomas to touch his wounds. When Jesus asked, “Who touched me?” it was not spoken in anger or as a reproach. Rather he wanted to see this person of faith, and he wanted to draw her even more to himself. It was because his own heart was so moved by the hurts and wounds of the world around him that he reached out with his healing touch, that he could respond to the needs of so many different people. His tears and his touch were as much a part of his saving presence, of his redemptive action, as his words and his prayers – indeed perhaps as his dying on the cross. Could we ever imagine how expressive that touch must have been – the touch of God on our skin! How consoling, how comforting, how strengthening!

And so, what about us? Have we felt the healing touch of Christ in our lives? Or perhaps a more important question: how have we helped others feel the healing touch of Christ in their lives? After all, isn't Jesus present in some mystical, mysterious, but real way in all of us? Two weeks ago we celebrated the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Body and Blood of Christ. But Paul, as we know, insists that *we* are the Body of Christ. Corpus Christi is our feast as much as it is a Feast of the Lord, and it's not just when we do what Jesus asked us to do to the least of his brothers and sisters that we are doing it for him, it's any time we deal in any way with one another. The Christ in me reaches out to touch the Christ in you. And when that happens there is healing and there is life.

Father John Donohue, a Jesuit scripture scholar, makes an interesting observation about today's Gospel passage. He sees special significance in the number twelve. The woman has been suffering for twelve years. Jairus's daughter is twelve years old. Now in the culture of the time twelve years was the age when a young girl became a woman and eligible for marriage, therefore also for motherhood. The woman whose suffering had lasted twelve years was prevented by this hemorrhage from bearing children. By curing the one and raising the other Jesus is not only healing and restoring life he is also making it possible for these two women now to continue participating in his own life-giving activity, as well as the creative work of God in our world.

Father Donohue goes on to say:

"The Jesus who emerges from these stories is one who is compassionate in the face of human suffering and who makes the needs of these sufferers the norm for his action, to the disregard of social taboos and conventions. He talks to a woman in public and allows her to touch him in spite of her ritual impurity, and he himself violates the stringent taboo against touching a corpse.

"Faith, especially as embodied by the bleeding woman, can exist in the face of seemingly hopeless situations. These narratives also challenge the church universal to recognize the courageous faith of women and to be on the side of women throughout the world whose human dignity and ability to give and sustain life are threatened by war, abuse, and poverty."

Thus far Father Donohue. For us at this moment it seems to me that

this passage challenges us to ask ourselves: What does it mean for us to bring the healing touch of Christ to others? How do we give new life to those who are dying in our world: dying not just physically, but also emotionally and spiritually? Can we help them hear Jesus say to them what he said to the daughter of Jairus, “I say to you, arise”?