**24th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

We read in today’s gospel passage about two very different people who approached Jesus Christ in different ways.   One was Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue.  He was an upstanding man in the Jewish community.  His position indicates that he had a good reputation and was thought to be a righteous man.  The other person was very different.  She was a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years, and had spent all her money on treatments that did not work.  Not only was she now poor, she was also considered unclean because of the flow of blood.  She was isolated:  anyone who had physical contact with her would also become unclean.  She could not even enter the Temple or have a normal social life.  She had been treated for twelve years as though we she was cut off from God and everyone else.

            This story shows the tremendous mercy of our Lord.  This woman had not said a word to Christ and had not even identified herself to Him.  She didn’t ask Him to make a decision to help her.  She was probably too afraid and humble to do those things. But she did what she could, reaching out to Christ in faith.

            At different times in our lives, we will all identify this woman.  Perhaps we have a long-term struggle, a weakness or cross that we have borne for years.  Perhaps we wrestle with some deep embarrassment or humiliation in our lives that we are afraid to acknowledge even to God, let alone other people.  Maybe we have done or suffered something that makes us feel unclean or unworthy in our relationship.  Maybe we can’t find the words to express our pain even to God in prayer, much less to others.  We may feel cut off from the Lord and separated from family and friends.

            If that’s the case, we should follow this woman’s example of touching the hem of His garment, of reaching out to Christ for mercy, healing, strength, and forgiveness as best we can.  He will not embarrass us or send us away.  Instead, He will respond graciously, as He always did to humble, sincere people who came to Him with faith, love, and repentance.   We won’t make Him unclean; instead, He will make us His beloved sons and daughters.

Jairus approached Jesus Christ differently, openly asking  Him to heal his dying daughter.  But his faith is then put to a very hard test.  For the girl dies, but the Lord says that she is only sleeping.  Everyone ridicules the Savior for this.  But Jairus somehow believed the astonishing word of the Lord:  “Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well.”

            Can you imagine how hard it must have been for Jairus and his wife to hear this news and to believe in the Lord’s promise?  Their daughter had just died and the mourning had begun.  It was time to start getting ready for the funeral, and here was Christ saying that the girl would soon be alive again.  Their faith was put to the test, but they did believe.  And the Lord did as He said:  He gave them back their daughter alive and healthy.

         People are different.  We have distinct personalities, occupations, interests, and spiritual strengths and weaknesses.  But we can all have faith.  When we open the wounds and sorrows of our lives to Christ as best we can, He will hear us.  And He will respond in the way that is best for our salvation, for our growth in holiness.  No two people have exactly the same journey to the Kingdom.  No two people pray, fast, give alms,  forgive, and serve in precisely the same way.  Jairus and the woman with the flow of blood were very different people who approached Christ differently.  But the one constant factor is the mercy of our Lord, which extends to all who call upon Him from their hearts with humble trust.

            If you are prepared to receive Communion today, I urge you to approach the chalice with “the fear of God and faith and love.”  For we do not simply touch the hem of Christ’s clothing in the Eucharist or ask him to heal our sick child.  We do far more, for we eat His flesh and drink His blood.  We commune in the most intimate way possible with the One Who has conquered sin and death.  And we do so praying that Jesus Christ will heal the deepest wounds of our souls and make us participants in the eternal life of the Kingdom.  We receive Communion by name, as unique individuals whose only hope is in our Lord.   Jairus and the woman came to Him in faith as best they could.  We should do the same.