

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

July 1, 2012

“Who touched me?” The question tells me something about Jesus. Physical touch marks the life of Jesus. Not only the woman with the hemorrhage, but so many of the sick he cured and the dead he raised – so often he touched them. The dead twelve-year-old girl in today’s Gospel; Peter’s fevered mother-in-law; a leper; blind men; a deaf man with a speech defect; an epileptic boy; the “sick with various diseases;” a woman bent over for eighteen years; the high priest’s slave whose ear Peter cut off – all of these he touched. When Peter was sinking in the sea, Jesus “reached out his hand and caught him.” Children he not only blessed; he “took them in his arms.” At the Last Supper he lovingly washed the feet of his disciples. And Jesus let others touch him: the sick at Gennesaret; the crowds; the sinful woman who “washed his feet with her tears” and dried them with her hair; Mary Magdalene after the Resurrection. He even invited Thomas to touch his wounds. How expressive his touch must have been – the touch of God on our skin! How consoling, how comforting, how strengthening!

“Who touched me?” tell us something about ourselves. Touch is communication. Touch *says* something – and says it in a way no other human power can rival. With a touch I tell you I care... I like you... I love you... I’m sorry for your troubles... I rejoice in your joy... I share your sadness, your weakness, your pain... I understand... I don’t know what to say... I congratulate you... I bless you... I accept you... I know how you feel... I’m lonely... I need you. And so on and so forth. There is little that touch cannot say. It tells me that life is communication. Life is giving and receiving. Life is exchange. Who touched me? Whom have I touched?

“Who touched me?” tells me something about Christian living. On three levels: the touch of Christ, the sacramental touch, and the touch of Christian love. Jesus Christ is here, is really present among us. That living presence makes it possible for me to reach out to him, to touch the hem of his garment. If I do, he turns to me, looks for me, wants me to know him, yearns to live in me. God and I touch.

This touch of Christ finds a physical expression in our sacraments. I touch water to a freshly born girl, and God's life streams through her. A bishop lays hands on a young man, oils him with chrism, and a new outpouring of the Spirit empowers him for ordination. I touch a fellow sinner with words of forgiveness, and he takes up his infirmities and walks again. I anoint a sick body, and God's life strengthens frail flesh and suffering spirit. I touch what looks like bread, touch what looks like wine, and fragile flesh ingests eternal life. A man and a woman link hands and in so touching they touch God to each other.

The touch of Christ and the sacramental touch is reflected in the touch of this Christian community. We must, Christ told us, love one another as he has loved us. It is my Christian responsibility, my Christian vocation, to reach out and touch another person. At times it will mean physical touch. It is a symbol of my whole self. *I touch you – not simply my hand.* And because I am touching you with my love, I am touching to you the love of Christ. But, like all human touch, it is an exchange. In touching, I am touched. Remember St. Francis of Assisi: "It is in giving that we receive." Whether it is my hand or my heart that reaches out to another, I not only *give* life, I *get* life.

More importantly, when we take Eucharist today, will the presence of Christ within us make us more aware of parishioners around us, without whom we would be less alive, less human, less Christian? And when we leave this church, will the touch of Christ and this worshiping community open us to those who need our life, our love? Someone on Second Avenue, in our home, at our workplace. All God's people. Rich and poor, young and old, saint and sinner. There are no untouchables with God.

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