

6th November 2022

21st after Pentecost

Luke 7

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1] We have all been there; we have all experienced that: you are in a tearing hurry to get somewhere on time, or you are in the middle of doing something or other, very urgent, but are then interrupted; someone else makes demands upon you.

2] Such is the drama that St Luke lays before us this morning. How we can sympathise with Jairus in his anxiety when Our Lord is halted on His way to the house of the ruler of the local synagogue. Only, Christ has no such anxiety over the pressure of time, as being divine and eternally beyond all sequences. And Christ is unconstrained by the order of events which are of no consequence to the One infinitely outside all contingencies and causation.

3] This is the same Christ who made no urgent dash to visit His friend, Lazarus, who was, at that time, dying. The same Christ who could walk across stormy waters to calm the fear and dread of his disciples, yet in His compassion was incarnate among us and allowed Himself to be taken by time and events, in obedience to His heavenly Father, bringing Him ultimately to the Cross for our salvation.

4] Yet if we look at these events through the eyes of people involved, we see only hope and great faith. In particular, that woman with the issue of blood, ritually impure according to the Law of Moses, defies all convention, risks exposure to mingle with the crowd and reach Christ. She is cut off, excluded by her condition from the religious life of Israel and with no access to its blessings.

5] Then at the centre of this incident come the words of Our Lord, 'Who touched me?' This is much more than just the physical sensation; He means something more significant than a slight bodily contact between two individuals. As Peter points out in any case, *'Master, the multitudes throng and press upon You and You say, Who touched me?'* By saying, *Who touched me?* Christ, here means, who reached me; who found me; who encountered me; who has contacted me?

6] The answer is, of course, that the woman with the issue of blood, by touching His garment, as if in a sacrament, as in a mystery, had by faith, reached out to Christ. That from which the Old Law had excluded her, was now established in the New: she had become included in the grace of Christ and the sign of that, the proof of that, was her healing.

7] In contrast, surely, the dead do not reach out to God? indeed, they cannot. As the Psalmist says, *'The dead shall not praise You, O*

Lord, neither do all those who descend into Hades.' (Ps.113:25) Yet here, instead, as Luke tells us, Christ took the little girl, Jairus' daughter, by the hand. He Himself seeks to touch the souls of those unable to seek Him, as He would when, after His own descent into Hades from the Cross, proclaim the gospel to the dead from all ages and harrow Hell, just as He is depicted in the Paschal icon, not actually rising Himself at that point, but raising the dead by the power of His own resurrection.

8] Our Lord once told those who claimed that only an oath sworn on the gold in the temple was binding, that it was the Temple that sanctified the gold. So it was that the very presence of the temple of His own incarnate body sanctifies all matter, even the hem of His garment that the women touched in faith. And free from the constraints of sequence and time, the light of His resurrection was yet shed upon Jairus' daughter by anticipation, a sign of His glory.

9] Just as it was for the people in today's gospel reading, so it is, nonetheless, with us. We too can reach out to touch Him, and still dead souls can be sought out by Him and be raised to newness of life. In the Church which is His body now, earthly as well as heavenly, the presence of the Holy Spirit has consecrated the means by which we may reach out and touch Him.

10] What else are we doing but touching Christ when we use oil, and water, bread and wine, holy icons and the relics of God's holy ones. This is why our life together in Christ is built around the holy sacraments, the physical manifestations of grace. In the water of baptism we died and rose with Christ; through the holy Myron in Chrismation we participate in the divine energy of God the Holy Spirit; in partaking of His precious body and blood in the communion sacrifice, we are sanctified, body and soul, unto eternal life.

11] Even when absent in body from this sacred assembly, when standing alone at our icon corner, we can still reach out to touch Him. For when we pray, we can stand on the threshold of the kingdom, entering through the sign of His cross. We can drink a little holy water, seeking the healing of the body, and can bless ourselves with holy oil for the curing of the soul. Even if we must be absent from the holy chalice, we can yet come close to Christ in taking antidoron as our first food of the day, as long as we undertake these things in faith, like the Canaanite women who replied to Our Lord, *'Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.'* (Matt.15:27)

12] Whilst we yet strive to live a truly spiritual life, let no one disparage or despise the physical life, for the body, though perishable in this fallen world, nevertheless reveals the essence and manifests

what lies beneath: the spiritual realities. Most of all, let none of us give up or lose faith in our prayer. Christ once told a parable concerning an importunate friend who called on his neighbour at night, begging for bread with which to feed a visitor. The point of the story is to teach us that prayer is not some kind of magic, ritually performed towards achieving our own selfish ends, but that it is our persistence, our regularity, our striving that keeps us holding on to Christ. And that we know, that although we must depart from here in due time, the souls of the righteous are in the hands of God, as it says in the Wisdom of Solomon (v.3:1) and that, at the last, in the time of their visitation they will shine forth (v.3:7) and holy souls will be revealed in the glory of the spiritual body and will be with the Lord for ever.