

Sermon on the Woman with an Issue of Blood
On Faith
Luke 8:41-56 24th Sunday After Pentecost

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Whenever we are about to set out on journey to a far place, especially a place which we have never gone to before, we are very quick to consult maps, travel guides, and the people that we know who have already visited our intended destination in order to find out the best way to get there and what we might find when we do arrive. In all these instances, we are placing an immense amount of faith in the persons (and things) we consult, trusting that because they know the way, we too, will also arrive at the destination we are seeking. Faith is, in fact, a tremendous part of our everyday lives, more so than we might think. We trust and place a great amount of faith in those who live with us, those who help us, drive us, those who feed us and serve us, those who deliver our necessities, those who govern and rule us, and even in those who teach us and preach to us. Whether we know it or not, faith is a big part of our life. (Even those who don't believe anything still believe in what they believe is true.)

Today's Gospel is about faith. In the Gospel account as the Lord walked to heal the sick and dying daughter of the leader of the Synagogue, Jairus, many people thronged about Jesus and yet they received no great benefit. Even today as well, many might come into God's house, into His very presence, venerate a miraculous icon, kiss the life-giving Cross, and even partake of the Sacred and Most Pure Body and Blood of Christ and receive no apparent benefit, like those who curiously crowded around the Lord. However, one woman in today's Gospel sought to touch the hem of Christ' garment and she did so with great faith, knowing, as the Gospel Matthew states, that if she could merely touch the very edge of the clothing of the Lord Jesus Christ she would become well. The sickness which the woman had possessed her for 12 terrible, shameful years. A continual flow of blood came from deep within her and since she was a Jew she was considered cursed and an outcast. This sickness, however, was to be for her salvation and for God's glory because she possessed one thing: Faith.

St. Isaac tells us that what we call **faith is actually 'the light which comes from God's grace** and dawns in the soul and fortifies and illumines the mind, granting it an undoubting assurance of hope.' (Through this faith 'we behold the mysteries' of the Kingdom which are hidden to those who are fleshly; mysteries which are only unveiled to us when we abide at Christ's table through studying and keeping His laws¹.) The woman in the Gospel had something that the many of the crowd did not: she had a terrible, humbling affliction that brought her heart and soul low enough so as to be filled with divine grace, like a thirsty bucket which descends into a deep well of water. Amazingly, it was not the people that were happy and healthy that Gospel often remembers and recounts but rather those who were sick, poor and in dire need....which the world and we ourselves would be quick to call "mis-fortunate" and yet these are the ones the Lord Himself called BLESSED in the Gospel (of St. Luke) precisely because they were the ones who had the possibility of turning to God and finding the reality of His saving power.

The sick woman only believed and she was made whole. Blessed Theophylact explained that the woman "first touched Christ noetically [that is, with her heart and soul] and only then did she touch Him bodily."² Likewise, he says, when anybody with their soul touches the clothing of Jesus, that is to say, His Incarnation, through prayer and through the Sacraments, believing that truly the Son of God became flesh, the deadly disease of sin that flows within them, (especially the flux of sinful thoughts), dries up and they become whole. (*Ibid.*) Afflictions which are received with faith turn us to better and higher things, and our cross's become our resurrections.

To have faith means that we believe, breath and live knowing that "all things work for the greater good of those who love God...."(as St. Paul says in his Epistle to the Romans.) And, it those who love God, as the Lord Himself said, that "keep [His] commandments." Consequently, true

1 Vlachos, Orthodox Psychotherapy, pg. 340. (partly paraphrased)

2 Theophylact on Luke pg. 91.

knowledge of things of God are acquired through faith which begins not with a book but rather with keeping the commandment: “Love the Lord Thy God with all thy heart, mind, soul and strength...” Faith is active and it pursues life in Christ through doing those things which are pleasing to God and to the benefit and salvation of one's neighbor, cultivating the flowers of grace with the water of good works and prayer, and pruning them through participation in the sacramental life of the Church.) Faith is a relationship between God and man, an alive and diligent response on the part of man to the grace that God pours into his heart and life through the Church.

St. Peter of Damaskos explains that “if we desire to acquire (real) faith—the foundation of all blessings, the door to God's mysteries, unflagging defeat of our enemies, the most necessary of all virtues, the wings of prayer and the dwelling place of God within our soul—we must endure every trial imposed by our enemies and by our many and various thoughts...” To have living faith we must look to God and say: “Do what Thou wilt to [me] Thy creature, for I believe that being good, Thou bestowest blessings on me, even if I do not recognize that they are for my benefit...For without Thee, [O Lord] I would not have come into existence from non-existence; without Thee I cannot live or be saved...I do not know what is best for me...Only...whatever happens, whether I will it or not, save me...I commit my souls into Thy pure hands in this age and in the age to be. Thou knowest all things; and Thou desires every kind of goodness for all men and ever longest for my salvation.”³

Christ our Lord is indeed the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Our faith in the One Who is both God and Man is an eternal treasure which will can never be taken from us even by death. We walk by faith and not by sight not because we are blind or because our minds are small and weak but rather because those things which are seen are temporary, fleeting, always changing, today one thing, another tomorrow....but the things which are given to us through faith raise us up above the ephemeral and fleeting to the eternal and grant us a real and living hope in God which comes only by His Grace.

Let us trust that if we are really trying to follow Christ then whatever happens is somehow for our salvation and serves as an opportunity to increase our faith. Let us have hope and always recall the word “but” that exists within many of the Church's prayers faith which say “Lord, I know that I have sinned or may be in sickness and trouble *BUT* I hope in you, O Lord, knowing that in due time you will help me...” “I may be receiving, O God, my just desert for sins and mistakes through sickness and affliction, *BUT* I know you will help me and I wait for you.” May we all approach Christ and touch the hem of His garments in the icons, in the relics of the Saints that surround us, in the Holy Cross...and even greater, and most importantly, in partaking and becoming one with Him in the Eucharist.

We are all on a journey to the Kingdom. Let us never abandon our Physician Christ the Lord or let go of the hem of His garment. May we take refuge and trust in the pilot and helmsman of the Church, Jesus Christ, following His directions on our journey to the Jerusalem on high, trusting that He will lead us if we follow Him with Faith. May we look to the Saints and to those who have gone before us, imitating their lives and walking in the way they have shown us, in order that we might see the way to the Kingdom where they now abide, understanding the end and culmination of our own Faith, which is the eternal salvation of our souls. To Him be all glory, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

3 St. Peter of Damaskos, pg. 164 Philokalia Vol 3.