

THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME, Year B

Wis 1:13-15; 2:23-24; Ps 30:2,4,5-6,11,12,13; 2 Cor 8:7,9,13-15; Mk 5:25-34

THE WOMAN WITH A HEMORRHAGE

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun

Saturday, June 30, 2018, 5:00 p.m.

Sunday, July 1, 2018, 8:30 and 10:30 a.m.

A woman was afflicted with a hemorrhage for twelve years (Mk 5:25).

Many women who appear in Scripture have a name:

Mary, Elizabeth, Anna, Martha, Susanna.

This woman has no name.

A person who goes without a name in a gospel story usually is a representative figure.

The woman represents you and me.

The woman had a hemorrhage that was a terrible affliction.

The woman was losing blood.

Let's talk about blood loss.

Blood carries oxygen.

Blood has red blood cells with hemoglobin that carry oxygen.

The normal range for hemoglobin is 14 or 15.

A person can have a bleeding ulcer,

or bleeding as a result of surgery.

A person can be suffering from anemia,

a low number of red blood cells.

Let's say a person's hemoglobin drops to 10,

or worse yet, it drops to 7.

Before we even talk about a blood transfusion,

let's examine the symptoms of a person with blood loss.

The person is pale.

The person is weak and tired.

The person's energy is low.

The person feels worn out.

Remember, the woman is a representative figure.

She is you and me.

She had blood loss.

We have blood loss.

Here we are in church, and we are anemic.

Our energy is down.

Our cheeks are not so rosy anymore.

We're looking a little pale.

We don't have as much energy as we used to have.

We've been battling temptation and sin for a long time.

The devil keeps attacking (see 1 Pt 5:8), and we keep fighting back,
and it is major a struggle, and it is exhausting.

The battle goes on,
day after day, week after week,
month after month, for years.

We have battle fatigue.

Why can't life be a little easier?

So the woman was losing blood.

This is not so good.

She was not just anemic, weak and tired,

she had blood coming out.

She had blood on her skin.

She had blood on her clothes.

In the Jewish mindset, according to Jewish law,
this made the woman ritually unclean (Lv 15:25-27).

She was impure, defiled, and dirty.

But remember, the woman is you and me.

At this moment,

every one of us is unclean or impure,
from one misdeed or another.

Our sins wound our souls.

Spiritually, we have been bleeding,

and like blood stains clothing,

our sins stain our souls (see Is 1:18),

and it is not a pretty sight,

and it is not a very happy situation.

This woman had been hemorrhaging for twelve years.

Twelve years is a long time.

Remember, twelve is a symbolic number,

and like the number forty, it represents fullness or completeness.

The woman had been battling temptation and sin for years,

and because of her many offenses,

she was suffering from long-term bleeding.

Time after time, when it came to temptation,

she gave in and sinned,

and she was worn out from the fight,

and she was quite weakened,

and unclean because of her failings.

And that woman is you and me.

Every one of us has been sinning for a long time.

We have habitual sins,

sins that we commit every day,

or multiple times a week.

We also have occasional sins,
a bad sin that we don't commit very often,
but we have an Achilles Heel,
a weak spot,
a place where we are vulnerable,
and even though we promised that we were going to quit that sin,
and we had been doing pretty well,
lo and behold, we slip again,
and it has been a struggle that has been going on for years.

The woman did not despair because of her sins.
She wanted the bleeding to stop.
She had gone to other people for help, but it never worked (Mk 5:26).
There was only one person who had the power to make it stop, Jesus.
So she made up her mind,
"Even though I'm unclean, I'm going to go to him anyway."

And you and me, we are that woman.
We want the bleeding to stop.
We want our energy back.
We want to be joyful again.
We want to feel clean all over.

That woman worked her way up to Jesus through the crowd.
We are working our way up to Jesus right here in church.

The woman was embarrassed, though.
She had a bad track record.
Twelve years' worth of sins,
when she counted them all up,
it made her sick just to think about it.
And you and me, with our habitual sins,
and our occasional sins that won't completely go away,
when we count them all up,
three years' worth, or five years,
or twelve years, or eighteen years (see Lk 13:11),
collectively, there are so many, too many,
and we're embarrassed.

The woman was humiliated,
but she still came up with a plan.

She thought,
"I don't want to look Jesus straight in the eye.
I just don't feel good about myself."

I know that he is loving and forgiving,
and I'm confident that he'll help me,
but I am just too afraid.
He is so good, and I've messed up so many times.
So this is what I am going to do.
Instead of approaching him from in front,
I'm going to come up from behind (see Mk 5:27).
Even if he doesn't see me,
if I touch him, or if I touch his cloak (Mk 5:28a),
I'll receive his forgiveness,
the wounds of my sins will be healed,
the bleeding will stop,
and after years of struggling,
at long last I can be healed."

That woman is you and me.
We are embarrassed by our sins.
We know that we have messed up far often,
and we also know that Jesus loves us and can heal us,
so we, too, have come up with a plan.
We have decided to go to Mass.
We have decided, sinners though we are,
to come forward and approach Jesus.

When the woman went to Jesus and touched him,
her bleeding stopped (Mk 5:29).

When we come to Jesus at this Mass,
and Jesus touches us with his Word in the Gospel,
and Jesus touches us with his Body and Blood
when we receive him at Holy Communion,
we receive his healing touch and healing grace.
When we touch Jesus,
the bleeding stops,
the wounds of our many sins are forgiven,
our energy comes back,
our hearts are filled with joy,
and we are clean all over.

Jesus loves us no matter what we have done.
He always wants us back.
At this Mass we humbly, contritely, approach our Lord Jesus in faith.

What Jesus said to that woman, he says to you and me:
"My child, your faith has saved you.
Go in peace and be cured of your affliction" (Mk 5:34b; see also Lk 13:12).