

The Touch of Jesus

... for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. ~ Mark 3:10



IF ALL THE HUMAN senses, touch is the one we cannot do without. It is a great calamity to be blind or deaf (or both), and loss of the sense of smell or taste can make life difficult. But we can die without touch. We all know that orphaned infants, placed in the care of an asylum but never held nor cuddled, more often than not will simply not survive. We know, without being told, that a hug is necessary to our well-being. A mother's kiss makes it "all better." Lovers cannot refrain from touching. A hand holding ours

"We, too, yearn to touch Jesus."

offers comfort that words cannot, especially in illness and as death approaches.

When Jesus walked on the earth, *"all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came forth from him and healed them all"* (Lk 6:19). The Gospels are full of the touch of Jesus: *"And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man, and begged him to touch him"* (Mk 8:22; see also Mt 20:34). *"And he stretched out his hand, and touched him, saying, 'I will; be clean.' And immediately the leprosy left him"* (Lk 5:13; see also Mk 1:41). *"And taking him aside from the multitude*



Jesus healing the sick, by Gustave Doré, 1855-1885

privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue... And his ears were opened, his tongue released, and he spoke plainly” (Mk 7:33, 35). “[H]e touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and served him” (Mt 8:15). Mothers brought their children: “Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them” (Lk 18:15). Those who could not touch him sought to touch at least his clothing: “And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or country, they laid the sick in the market places, and besought him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment; and as many as touched it were made well” (Mk 6:56). His touch gave life: “But taking her by the hand he called, saying, ‘Child, arise.’ And her spirit returned, and she got up at once; and he directed that something should be given her to eat” (Lk 8:54-55).

An affecting story of touch is that of a woman of ill repute, who entered a Pharisee’s home when Jesus was there for dinner. In her sorrow for her sins, she “brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment” (Lk 7:37-38). When the Pharisee

objected to the woman touching Jesus, Jesus’ response was of love and mercy toward her (see Lk 7:39-47). In an act of great humility, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples just before the Last Supper (see Jn 13:3-9). He used touch to restore a doubting Thomas to faith in his Resurrection: “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing” (Jn 20:27).

The apostles testified that Jesus was, indeed, human as well as God; that God could be touched. The Apostle John wrote about Jesus that not only was he “which was from the beginning” but also he whom “we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands” (1 Jn 1:1). This is a bedrock concept of our faith.

We, too, yearn to touch Jesus. Jesus knows the value of his humanity to us. He knows our human needs, including the need for touch. He promised, “I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you” (Jn 14:18) and told his apostles, “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:20). These promises he fulfilled by ensuring that, even in this life, we can touch him in a warm and tender communion. We call our reception of him in the Eucharist “Holy Communion”

and, indeed, it is, for communion is essentially touch, the wondrous touch of God in us. A great fourth-century bishop, St. John Chrysostom, told us: “When the [priest] says, ‘This is my Body,’ be convinced of it and believe it, and look at it with the eyes of the mind... If you were incorporeal he would have given you those incorporeal gifts naked; but since the soul is intertwined with the body, he hands over to you in tangible things, that which is perceived intellectually. How many now say, ‘I wish I could see his shape, his appearance, his garments, his sandals.’ Only look! You see him! You touch him. You eat him. He had given to those who desire him, not only to see him

and fix their teeth in his flesh, and to embrace him and satisfy all their love” (Homily on the Gospel of Matthew; italics added). What a great Lover he is, to give himself to us, body and blood, soul and divinity, in the Eucharist.

And yet Jesus has one more gift to offer. When he ascended to his Father, he did so bodily (see Acts 1:9-11). We are bodily beings, not merely spirits. Until we regain our bodies after death, we are incomplete. In the power of Jesus’ Resurrection, we, too, are promised that we will receive glorified bodies. And when we do, we will not only be granted the glorious Beatific Vision but also the divine and eternal embrace of the arms of our Savior.

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**“Only look! You see him!
You touch him. You eat him.”**