

## **SERMON: Touch the Hem of His Garment (Luke 8:41-56) November 4, 2018**

The woman who came to our Lord today was grievously ill for twelve years. For twelve years she was hemorrhaging non-stop. This illness radically changed her life and the social consequences of her illness were staggering. According to the Jewish Law she was considered unclean, so she was forbidden from entering the Temple and she was forbidden from coming into contact with people. Furthermore, her illness was embarrassing. Even if the Law permitted it, she most likely wouldn't go out in public or socialize anyway, because she constantly had to tend to the blood issuing from her, clean it up and replace her garments and bandages. How does a person cope with such a situation for such a long time? She did what any of us would do, she went to physicians. It is not wrong to go to physicians. Medical science is a gift from God. Patriarch Pavle of Serbia (of blessed memory) said that the work of the priest and the work of the physician are very similar; both offer worthy service to God and others. However, the physicians couldn't help her. In fact, the Gospel says that she spent all of her money on physicians, but in vain. Remarkably, she does not give up and despair. She perseveres and clings to hope. How is this possible? She perseveres because she has a strong faith. As much as we don't like to see anyone suffer, especially ourselves, the hard fact is that suffering can benefit us spiritually. That is why God permits suffering, because it is actually necessary for our salvation. That is why Jesus says that if we would be his disciples, we must first take up our cross before we can follow him. When we are suffering, our focus isn't going to be on earthly pleasures and having a good time. When we are well and enjoying ourselves, we tend to sometimes or maybe even often forget about God. Perhaps we may even neglect our prayers and maybe our attendance in church suffers as well. The golden age of Christianity was its earliest years when the Christians were being persecuted. Almost every day we commemorate saints on the church calendar who were martyred for their faith. After the Edict of Milan, after the persecution ceased, we actually see a rapid decline in the quality of the Christian life. Those who still tried to be serious about their faith in Christ and live according to the Gospel often fled into the desert. This is the reason for the origin of Christian monasticism. We shouldn't have to flee into a monastery to live according to the Gospel. All Christians should be precise and serious about living according to the Gospel, and not only the monastics. I remember Fr. Sergius, abbot of St. Tikhon's Monastery, saying in a lecture that when a person is dying, their focus is on God and eternal things. It isn't likely that a person on their deathbed is going to worry about going to Walmart. The point is, we shouldn't have to be on our deathbed or suffer from persecution in order for our main focus to be on God and eternal things. God is helping us, even though we may not always see or understand it, that when he sends a cross our way, it is an attempt to nudge us to do the right thing. I remember someone coming to Confession to me one time whom I never saw before. It took a serious catastrophe for her to run to God and to run to the church for help. Sadly, without this catastrophe in her life, I probably never would have seen her in Confession. The woman with the hemorrhage's strong faith gives her the hope and strength to endure for twelve years. Everyone is different. For one person, perhaps a year would have been enough. For another maybe it would have taken thirty years or maybe even a lifetime. The dosage of the medicine is given to the patient according to the need and according to the severity of the illness. This analogy applies to spiritual sickness the same as it applies to physical illness. The woman's faith leads her to the Lord and she secretly touches the hem of His garment. In the Gospel song "Touch the Hem of His Garment" it says that the woman cried "Oh Lord! If I could just touch the hem of your garment I know I'll be made whole right now." Jesus tells the woman that her faith has made her well, go in peace. Faith can make us well and can bring peace to our lives as well. Fr. Tom Hopko said that from an early age his mother taught him the necessity of three things: to pray, to go to church, and to always remember God. When we pray, go to church and always remember God, we touch the hem of His garment. May the Lord grant unto all of us the faith of this woman, and may all of us touch the hem of His garment. Amen!

