



HEALING MINISTRY by Father Robbie Low  
Talk 3

### **Mark Chapter 5 - The woman with the Haemorrhage/The Dying child**

I recently sat down late night to watch the documentary on the Rolling Stones entitled 'Crossfire Hurricane'. Co-produced by the star, Sir Michael Jagger, it is inevitably an extended advertisement for his own performance but not without sociological merit for those who would study the wellsprings of our present moral confusion. Jagger, leaps, points, struts, yelps and fag-dances his way through a growing crescendo of Dionysian frenzy from the delirious fans. At the end of the show the band are whisked away by high security before the fans can literally 'get a piece of them'.

This kind of crowd hysteria seemed to me a useful backdrop to today's Gospel story. Jesus is surrounded by huge crowds. There is no public security, just the beefy fishermen he called and their crew. Everyone wants to get near Jesus. It's not that He's got great songs it's that He can heal them. No wonder He often needs to get away for a break. Sir Mick would, at least there, have some sympathy. Crowds are relentless and have a corporate agenda more threatening than the sum of the individuals involved. Behaviour unthinkable becomes the normal. So this is the context of the healing story.

The objects of the healing are diverse and, in one case unintentional. Today I want to focus on that one, the woman with the haemorrhage. In addition to the unholy scrum around Jesus, there is another obstacle for the woman. Her illness must remain a secret. She is ritually unclean. Now a lot of hooey is talked these days about the denigration of women in the patriarchy by describing menstrual issues as 'unclean' BUT we need to remember that the disciplines were actually imposed upon men to stop them making a nuisance of themselves at inappropriate times and for the weeks after childbirth.

They were a protection for women. 'Unclean' means 'out of bounds'.

Nevertheless, here we are. She is not to know that Jesus reaches out to the ultimate socially unclean, the lepers. She just has to disguise her secret and hope to touch Him.

Two things here then for us. One is that we know that many people are shy about their infirmities. For example men seldom advertise genital dysfunction even to their closest buddies. Women do not volunteer, at least in mixed company, to unburden about irregular cycles, miscarriages, abortions etc. For many people all their medical issues are total no-go areas.

I take part in a regular review of my Parkinson's. One of the questions is, 'Do you feel embarrassed about people knowing?' My answer is always, 'NO'. I would like to have a badge that says, 'I'm not drunk, I've got Parkinsons'. Once people know they are fantastically helpful.

You may find, in healing ministry, that people will not want to disclose too much. That's Ok. It's a help if they do but it's not disastrous if they don't. You may also be surprised to find that the secret seeker may have more faith than you. The haemorrhaging woman is certain that if she can just touch the hem of Jesus robe, such is His power, that she will be healed. She wants to remain anonymous. This belief is echoed in Matthew 14v36 where the sick want to touch the hem of His garment and are healed. This gives us an insight into the value of relics – the things that have touched or been part of holy people contain a Christian charge. Those of you who have been to a YOUTH 2000 healing service will be familiar with the priest, in humeral veil, proceeding slowly along the altar rail, Blessed Sacrament in hand and stopping at each person so they can hold the sacrament veil and pray for the sick person. (This is a way of praying that we shall return to.) We touch with intent. So this woman touches with intent, with prayer, with a desperate and longing heart. When Jesus asks, 'Who touched me?' The disciples cry, 'Lord everybody touched you'. But Jesus knows the difference between the surging scrum and the praying hand. The woman is forced to confess her 'shameful secret'. Shameful on two counts now. One because she has to confess endangering the ritual purity of the Lord and two because she has drawn power

from Him just when He needs it most. He is, after all, on the way to a dying child. We do not need to be psychologically too cute to grasp what is going on here. The woman has been bleeding twelve years – possibly since a miscarriage or botched illegal termination. The child who will be raised from the dead is, we are told, twelve years old. There are no coincidences in Scripture just providences. There is no limit to the power of the Lord's forgiveness and His merciful restoration. Where there is hesitation or shame in reaching out for healing the suppliant needs to be reassured that this is the case and that, should they need it, they will be introduced to a priest who understands. Someone who comprehends their dilemma and is familiar with the healing, reconciling and sanctifying way ahead which may well pass through the healing gate of the confessional where, restored and reconciled, the wounded need bleed no more.