

Sometimes when I meditate on the communion, I try to think especially about the body of Christ. It is much easier to consider the cleansing blood of Christ, but I feel that we must pay attention to the other half of this memorial. I conjure up an image of His body being carried to the grave, a body now stained with sweat and blood. Too many times in our imagination we don't see all of the details, as when we think of laying down in a pleasant field and leaving out the part about the chiggers and pollen. But the body of Christ was certainly soiled. The question we should ask is, are we put off by it? Would we be afraid to touch it? Is it too dirty?

I think about the "funeral" of Christ. I have been to (too many) funerals, and many times driven in the long line of cars that proceed out to the cemetery for the burial. Throughout the proceedings there was a sense of dignity and ceremony which gave honor to the dead. But contrast this to the burial of Christ. It was just a couple of guys hurriedly trying to do something decent for their friend before the Passover period began.

We should be grateful to Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus for performing this service. I can see them wrestling with the body, which was covered with blood, sweat, and other bodily fluids and was possibly beginning to stiffen with rigor mortis. They probably used sheet of some sort to wrap him up and carry him along to the borrowed grave. They took the time to wrap the body in spices with strips of cloth, for Nicodemus had brought 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes for this task.

I have been a pallbearer many times in my life, but I have never had to get this personal with the body. And remember that in those times that anyone who touched a dead body became ceremonially unclean. Some of the women had followed to see where he would be laid, for they would bring more spices as soon as the Passover services were completed. Did they say any words over the grave when they were done, I wonder? Surely there was a eulogy of some kind for their friend.

I am sure that many people touched Christ in the vitality of his life. When the woman with the issue of blood sneaked a touch and Jesus said "Who touched me?" the apostles wondered because there were so many in the throng that were touching him. But there were only a few who were there to touch him in the disappointment of his death.

The woman with the issue of blood touched the hem of his garment. Again we must realize that this hem drug the ground and was most assuredly very dirty. This was the quality of life in this time of sandals and earthen streets. The image of the Peanuts character Pig Pen comes to mind. This is why washing the feet of visitors was a common act of hospitality. When Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, he was not bothered by the filth, but his love overflowed in this act of cleansing.

Jesus was not at all "put off" by our sin or dirt. Remember that he touched the leper to heal him. We are all just as unworthy of such contact. Peter, when Jesus came to wash his feet, realized his filthiness and at first did not want Christ to dirty himself. In a similar way, I think that the woman with the issue of blood realized her uncleanness and tried to touch only the most unclean part of Christ. We must likewise realize our sin in the sight of God as we approach His throne through Jesus.

Christ offers his body to us. We must embrace it in the best of times and in the worst of times. Mary Magdalene, from whom seven devils had been cast out, embraced Christ in the garden when she realized who he was; Jesus had to ask her not to keep holding on to him. And I imagine that Thomas gripped him pretty hard when Christ asked him to touch the wounds in his hands and his side, for he exclaimed, "My Lord and My God!"

Christ carried our sins to the cross and yet was not stained by them. He went to the grave but did not see corruption. We must think about the earthly body that endured so much pain and trouble for us. It is not dirty, but most beautiful, for it represents God's greatest gift of love. We must hold on to it in our hearts not just when it appears pure and clean (as when our problems are small) but when it we don't want to (as when we struggle with disobedience and despair). We must truly remember the sacrifice of Christ for ever.