



(ZENIT, Vatican City, August 31, 2016).- Here is a working translation of the address Pope Francis gave during this morning's General Audience in St. Peter's Square.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!

The Gospel we heard shows us a figure that stands out for her faith and courage. It is the woman that Jesus cured from her loss of blood (cf. *Matthew* 9:20-22). Passing in the midst of the crowd behind Jesus to touch the fringe of his garment, “she said to herself, ‘If I only touch His garment, I shall be saved’” (v. 21). How much faith! How much faith this woman had! She reasons thus, because she is animated by much faith and much hope and, with a touch of shrewdness, she does what she has in her heart. The desire to be cured by Jesus is such, as to make her go beyond the prescriptions established by the Law of Moses. For many years, in fact, this poor woman was not simply ill but was regarded as impure because she was suffering from a hemorrhage (cf. *Leviticus* 15:19-30). Therefore, she is excluded from the liturgies, from conjugal life, and from normal relations with her neighbor. The evangelist Mark adds that she had consulted many doctors, spent all her means to pay them and endured painful cures, but she only got worse. She was a woman discarded by the society. It is important to consider this condition — of being discarded — to understand her state of mind: she feels that Jesus can free her from the ailment and from the state of marginalization and indignity in which she has found herself for years. In a word: she knows, she feels that Jesus can *save her*.

This case makes one reflect on how woman is often perceived and represented. We are all put on guard, including Christian communities, from views of femininity suffused with damaging prejudices and suspicions of her intangible dignity. In this connection, it is precisely the Gospels that restore the truth and leads back to a liberating point of view. Jesus admired the faith of this woman whom all avoided and transformed her hope in salvation. We do not know her name, but the few lines with which the Gospels describe her encounter with Jesus, delineate an itinerary of faith capable of re-establishing the truth and the grandeur of the dignity of every person. It is in the encounter with Christ that the way of liberation and salvation opens for all, men and women of every place and every time.

Matthew's Gospel says that when the woman touched Jesus' garment, He "turned" and "saw her" (v. 22), and then He addressed her. As we were saying, because of her state of exclusion, the woman acted in a hidden way, behind Jesus, she was a bit afraid, so as not to be seen, because she was a discarded one. Instead, Jesus sees her and His look is not one of reproach, He does not say: "Go away, you are a discarded one!" as if He said: "You are a leper, go away!" No, He does not reproach her but Jesus' look is one of mercy and tenderness. He knows what happened and seeks a personal encounter with her, which deep down the woman desired. This means that, not only does Jesus receive her but He regards her as worthy of such an encounter to the point of gifting her with His word and His attention.

In the central part of the account, the term *salvation* is repeated *three times*. "If I only touch His garment, I shall be *saved!*" Jesus turned around, saw her and said: "take heart, daughter, your faith has *saved you!*" And from that instant the woman was *saved*" (vv. 21-22). This "take heart, daughter" expresses all God's mercy for that person. - and for every discarded person. How many times we feel interiorly discarded because of our sins, we have committed so many, we have committed so many ... And the Lord says to us: "Take heart! Come! I do not consider you a discarded one. Take heart, daughter. You are a son, a daughter." And this is the moment of grace, it is the moment of forgiveness, it is the moment of inclusion in Jesus' life, in the life of the Church. It is the moment of mercy. Today to all of us, sinners, whether we are great or little sinners - but we all are <sinners> to all of us the Lord says: "Take heart, come! You are no longer discarded: I forgive you, I embrace you." Thus is God's mercy. We must have courage and go to Him, ask forgiveness for our sins and go forward - with courage, as this woman did. Then "salvation" assumes many connotations: first of all, it restores health to the woman; then it frees us from social and religious discriminations; in addition, it fulfils the hope that she bore in her heart, banishing her fears and discomfort. Finally, it restores her to the community, liberating her from the need to act in a hidden way. And this last thing is important: a discarded person always acts in a hidden way, sometimes or <during> his whole life: we think of the lepers of those times, of today's homeless ...; we think of sinners, of us sinners: we always do something in a hidden way; we have the need to do something in a hidden way, because we are ashamed of what we are ... And He frees us from this, Jesus frees us and makes us stand: "Arise, come, stand up!" As God has created us: God created us upright, not humiliated — upright. What Jesus gives is total salvation, which reintegrates the woman's life in the sphere of God's love and, at the same time, re-establishes her in her full dignity.

In the end, it is not the garment the woman touched that gave her salvation, but *the word of Jesus, received in faith*, capable of consoling her, healing her and re-establishing her in her relation with God and with her people. Jesus is the only source of blessing from which salvations flows for all men, and faith is the fundamental disposition to receive it. Once again Jesus, with His behavior full of mercy, indicates to the Church the course to follow to encounter every person, so that each one can be healed in body and spirit and recover the dignity of children of God.

[Original text: Italian] [Working Translation by ZENIT]

I give a cordial greeting to the Italian-speaking pilgrims.

I am happy to receive the faithful of the Archdiocese of Genoa, accompanied by Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco; and of the Diocese of Melfi-Rapolla-Venosa, with the Bishop, Monsignor Gianfranco Todisco. I wish you a Jubilee pilgrimage rich in spiritual fruits for your good and that of your ecclesial communities.

I greet the seminarians of Milan; the parish groups, especially the faithful of Pogliano Milanese, Inveruno, Pieve del Cairo and Polla, as well as the “cyclists of mercy” of Teggiano.

A special greeting goes to young people, the sick and newlyweds. May the heroic martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist, which we remembered on Monday, solicit you, dear young people, to plan your future without compromises with the Gospel; may it help you, dear sick, to be courageous, finding serenity and comfort in Christ crucified; may it lead you, dear newlyweds, to a profound love for God and for each other, to experience every day the consoling joy that flows from the mutual gift of self.

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