

A picture speaks a thousand words. In today's Gospel, Jesus provides us with a picture of what a Sacrament is:

*There was a woman afflicted with hemorrhages for twelve years. She had suffered greatly at the hands of many doctors and had spent all that she had. Yet she was not helped but only grew worse. She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak. She said, "If I but touch his clothes, I shall be cured." Immediately her flow of blood dried up. She felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. Jesus, aware at once that power had gone out from him, turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who has touched my clothes?"* Mark 5:21-43



A picture inspired by this Gospel was painted in the early 4<sup>th</sup> Century, in the catacomb (an underground Christian graveyard) of Saints Marcellinus and Peter, at a time when Christianity was violently under siege. Before this image, set in an underground graveyard, Christians would celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in secret to avoid persecution. The picture, shown here, can also be found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church at the beginning of the section which teaches the Sacraments. You ask, **"How does this image speak to us a thousand words about the nature of the seven Sacraments?"** Glad you asked! Since I don't have space for a thousand words, let me mention just three ways (there are more!) along with some references to the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

(1) The image shows Jesus' body as the source of the Sacraments.

Sacraments are "powers that comes forth" from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church. They are "the masterworks of God" in the new and everlasting covenant. (CCC 1116)

"Adhering to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, to the apostolic traditions, and to the consensus ... of the Fathers," we profess that "the sacraments of the new law were ... instituted by Jesus Christ our Lord". (CCC #1114)

(2) As in the image, the Sacraments provide divine power and healing grace precisely by making the body of Christ present at a particular time, in a particular place, through tangible signs and symbols which allow us, by faith, to touch his body.

Jesus' words and actions during his hidden life and public ministry were already salvific, for they anticipated the power of his Paschal mystery. They announced and prepared what he was going to give the Church when all was accomplished. The mysteries of Christ's life are the foundations of what he would henceforth dispense in the sacraments, through the ministers of his Church, for "what was visible in our Savior has passed over into his mysteries [i.e. Sacraments] (St. Leo the Great)." (CCC 1115)

(3) The image depicts the dispositions required of the recipient of the Sacraments. In the image we see what the Scriptures portray: the woman approached Jesus with profound faith, candor and reverence.

*She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak. She said, "If I but touch his clothes, I shall be cured."* (Mk 5:27-28)

*The woman, realizing what had happened to her, approached in fear and trembling. She fell down before Jesus and told him the whole truth.* (Mk 5:33)

The assembly should *prepare* itself to encounter its Lord and to become "a people well disposed." The preparation of hearts is the joint work of the Holy Spirit and the assembly, especially of its ministers. The grace of the Holy Spirit seeks to awaken faith, conversion of heart, and adherence to the Father's will. These dispositions are the precondition both for the reception of other graces conferred in the celebration itself and the fruits of new life which the celebration is intended to produce afterward. (CCC 1098)

Seventeen hundred years ago one of our inspired and creative brothers or sisters in Christ attempted to capture in an image the Gospel story we hear in this Sunday's Mass. May this inspired image inspire us to contemplate and appreciate the divine riches and beauty our Lord offers when he makes himself present in the Sacraments allowing us to approach him with faith, reverence and candor, to reach out and touch his cloak. Yes, a picture can certainly speak a thousand words, and in this case, inspire a thousand blessings!

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