

A shocking but memorable event happened very early in my ministry. Soon after ordination I attended the annual clergy retreat in the diocese of HK. It was in the early 80s. It was held in a Franciscan monastery in HK island, a very quiet place, situated in a small hill overlooking the sea. When meal time came I was absolutely astounded to notice the Franciscan monks' menu was very much different from ours. They were supposed to be mendicants. We were simply having rather ordinary food but theirs were very sumptuous. After meal, we were offered just tea or coffee, but the monks were having Johnny Walker Red label. Some were having cigars as well. To a newly ordinand who regards St. Francis of Assisi as one of his heroes, especially his emphasis on the naked poverty of Christ on the Cross, I was rather disillusioned with those monks who had deserted their founder's great teaching. How come they could live so sumptuously? It turns out the monastery had sold part of their land to a real estate developer. This incident can be a modern interpretation of Paul's words in today's epistle reading: *Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.* St. Francis literally stripped off his clothes before his father and onlookers in the market place in order to follow Christ, but some of his monks in HK reversed his decision.

And yet no-one has ever made a such stupendous statement except the Apostle Paul! I wonder, what do we make of it? A nonsensical statement! Or don't really know what Paul means!

Where do we see the poverty of Christ and are we really rich if the exchange has happened? If one cannot see this stark contrast in one's life, what is the point to call oneself a Christian.

In this statement of Paul a Christian is someone who has experienced a wonderful exchange from poverty to riches. And it is not accidental, like winning a lotto! It is all due to what Jesus Christ has done. He exchanges his riches with our poverty.

NT distinguishes two levels of poverty and riches. According to the SM in Matthew's gospel, the beatitude has it, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*". Whereas in Luke's gospel, in the sermon on the Plain, we have "*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*" That is to say, we can understand poverty and riches in material as well as spiritual terms. We cannot pit one against the other. Often it is difficult to distinguish one from the other. Is poor health only a material poverty? Is death simply a non-material entity?

In the gospel reading, we have this woman who suffers from hemorrhages for twelve years and becomes poor spending all she has on medical expenses. Can we not discern two different levels of poverty in her? Likewise, the 12 years old daughter of Jairus has just passed away. One may say, 'poor girl!' Poor because she has lost her life; not reaching full adulthood.

Have you ever wondered how did Jesus heal these two females? A pietistic answer might say, 'It is because the woman has faith in Jesus; likewise Jairus has

faith in Jesus.’ This is too simplistic. And it is wrong to have the healing process laid on human initiative, notwithstanding faith.

In these two healing incidents, have we not noticed an exchange process also occurred? In the story of the woman who suffers from hemorrhages, Jesus is aware of *‘power had gone forth from him!’* And the woman also notices *‘her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.* You may call it a miracle, I prefer to call it an exchange by Jesus. This power of Jesus eventually and supremely is manifested on the cross. St. Francis calls it the naked poverty of Christ. John’s gospel tells us, ‘Blood and water came out from Jesus on the cross.’ Ever since the Good Friday, this most excellent exchange by Jesus has been continuing without end. That is the power Jesus is aware of. The woman felt it. Have you, especially when you come to receive the Eucharist?

Jairus daughter, poor girl died without ever lived a full life! We may say in our post-modern term she has not lived to enjoy person-hood to the full. Christianity claims that no one has ever lived a full life except Jesus. Post-modern person-hood emphasizes self-realization and self-fulfilment. These great words become true only in Jesus. I’m sure you’re very familiar with these words of Jesus, often said in funeral: *‘I am the way, the truth and the life, no-one can come to the Father but through me.’* The story tells us, Jesus *“took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up! And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about”.* That touch by Jesus is the exchange of genuine life with death. And ever since the first Good Friday and Easter, this supreme exchange has never stopped

until eternity. Have you ever been touched by Jesus? If not, why bother to come to Eucharist?

Last Sunday our Rector wants us to see in Mark's gospel who Jesus is. Have you ever asked why He could perform these two miracles? Can you not relate it to Paul's saying of exchange? If we simply say because Jesus was God, then Christianity is no better and no worse than other religions. The Nicene Creed informs us Jesus is fully God and fully man. Paul in Phil 2:6-9 has revealed to us, the divine Son of God has become the Son of Man without losing his divine nature. It is in Jesus Christ the God-man, the interchange of riches with poverty, the exchange of life with death first occurs. Hence it is only through Jesus, the God-man, the exchange of riches with poverty has and will always continue, until the end of the ages. That is the distinctive feature of Christianity. Miracle happens first in Jesus himself and then passes on to these two females.

When we come to Church on Sunday and recite the *The Prayer of Humble Access: that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood*, what do you make of it? You go to a bank and hand in a blank cheque, in return you receive a billion dollars! What an exchange! Much more than that when you come to church and receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ!