I just returned from a retreat at St. Meinrad’s Archabbey in Indiana this past week. It is a place I had never been before so I was excited and a little anxious about what to expect. I spent the first half of the week in Louisville for work and then left for the abbey Wednesday afternoon. When I arrived, I checked in and grabbed all my stuff: a rolling backpack full of books, a regular backpack full of work stuff and a huge suitcase to accommodate my entire week of travel. So I schlepped my stuff toward my room which was in a building several hundred yards from the where I was. I found the door that I was told to use to get to my room which opened up into a hallway and eventually a staircase about halfway down. My room was on the fourth floor of this very large, old but beautiful building. So I carried the 1000 pounds of stupidity up the four long flights of 24 stairs each and stopped at the top to regroup. After a minute or so I followed the numbers on the doors down the hallway in the direction of my room, room 423. Past rooms 418, 419, …20, …21…22…24….? There was no 423! I looked around and the only other room I saw was room 426 across from another set of stairs! So I paused for a moment and realized that there was a short corridor across from room 426 on the other side of the stairwell. So I peeked around the corner and there it was, ROOM 423….right next to the elevator!

So why am I sharing this story…I don’t know other than it was kinda funny at the time and that it seems typical of the kind of stuff that happens to me when I go on retreat. It’s very humbling. This is why I bring it up; my mind was racing with this new and unfamiliar place and I was juggling multiple heavy objects. I was too distracted by what I was experiencing; too wrapped up in the moment; and too
sure that I knew the best or only way to do something, that I went against my better judgment and common sense and failed to seek out what would have really helped me: an elevator. How many times have we been so overwhelmed by our situations in life that we fail to seek out what would really help us: Christ?

Our readings today are meant to remind us that we MUST rely on God in our times of need. Healing, redemption and sanctification only come through Jesus Christ BUT, it is up to us to seek him out with true faith and perseverance. We see this in the faith of the synagogue official and the woman with the hemorrhage. Both were in dire situations and both went to extreme measures to seek out Jesus, whom they knew through faith, could help them. A lot has been written about this gospel and the extreme measures both Jairus and the woman took just to make contact with Jesus in such a profound way. Their faith compelled them and it was ultimately their faith in Christ that helped them: faith in the One who gives life and conquers death. What is important for us today is to see in both, Jairus and the Woman with the hemorrhage, the model of ardent faith: to go beyond ourselves and our setbacks and even what others might think in order to be transformed.

This transformation is not simply physical healing from illness or injury, though that is part of it, but it is spiritual healing that each of us need because of sin. That’s one of the reasons we come to Mass. Each of us though, also has the opportunity to seek out physical and spiritual healing through the sacraments of Healing: Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick. Too often though we instead try to heal ourselves or seek the help of those who cannot help us just like the physicians who could not heal the woman’s bleeding. Or, too often we are tempted to think that it is too late, the damage is done, “why trouble the teacher any longer?” like the people from the official’s house said. THIS IS NOT TRUE! IT IS NEVER TOO LATE! Jesus says, “Do not be afraid; just have faith.”

This is the message of the gospel today. “Do not be afraid; just have faith.” It sounds so simple but it is challenging because of those things that weigh us down. This is true for physical healing. We must trust with faith that when we seek Christ for healing of illness or physical ailments that our prayers
are answered even though the outcomes may not always fit our expectations. The same is true of spiritual healing. I know from personal experience. Earlier in my life I went a long time, 15 or 16 years, without receiving reconciliation and the longer I stayed away, the more difficult it was, emotionally, to come back. But Jesus transforms us, makes us new and gives life and that’s what happened for me, then and even this past week. I had to decide to seek Him out in reconciliation and navigate “the crowd,” if you will, and humble myself to ask, with confidence and faith, for His healing power. This is what the Sacraments of Healing are for: our physical and spiritual healing; a restoration to the image of God as He created as we heard in the first reading from Wisdom.

Jesus is the only one who can heal us and give us new life. We must set aside our fear of the unknown as well as our pride and self-reliance in order to seek Him out, no matter the obstacles or the heavy weight we bear, in order to find the one thing that can truly help us: “the elevator outside our door” if you will, who is Christ.

…By the way, when I left my retreat I took the elevator down…I thought it was important to practice what I preach!!!