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“Come, lay your hand on her, and she will live” (Matt 9:18).

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the making of “The Wizard of Oz,” a film especially beloved for the song, “Somewhere over the Rainbow.” Judy Garland’s performance of that song conveyed the longing everyone has entertained of transcending life’s troubles in a land where dreams come true.

The idea of being somehow transported into the heavens has inspired both religion and science, evidenced by another anniversary this year commemorating the 1969 moon landing.

Jacob’s dream of a stairway between heaven and earth in Genesis 28 expresses the same longing, but with an important twist. It envisioned a time when humanity would be reconnected to divinity, when heaven would be united to earth in a continuous cycle of ascending and descending angels. But rather than escaping the world, the world would be made sacred again, as it was in the beginning when the Creator was reflected in Creation and the universe revealed the image and likeness of God.

Jacob grounds his dream to earth by anointing the stone his head had rested on, calling it the “the gateway to heaven.” God’s promise to redeem the world was at the heart of the covenant between God and the Chosen People. This symbol of the unifying power of love is fulfilled in the Incarnation, the joining of divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus. God comes to earth not to take us to heaven but to

show us how to bring heaven to earth by love. Jesus bears the divine image, revealing what a human being is meant to be, and everything he touches or that touches him is blessed by the new Creation.

Today's Gospel about the healing of the woman suffering from hemorrhages and the raising of the daughter of Jairus repeatedly mentions touch. The woman pushes her way through the crowd to touch the tassel of Jesus' cloak as he passes by. He immediately knows that someone has touched him and that a healing has occurred. When Jesus arrives at the house where the girl has already died, he dismisses the professional mourners, enters the room and takes her by the hand, restoring her to life.

The sacred body of Jesus, the Word made flesh, remains in the world as his Holy Spirit indwells his followers at Pentecost, making them the body of Christ in history, the continuation of God's plan of redemption. The Eucharist becomes the celebration of this timeless mystery. God is in the world as spirit and life, as food for the journey and as the continual divine touch that heals, reconciles and blesses. We share in that divine touch by remaining in his love, which unites us to one another.

In another classic movie, "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," three levels of evidence for extraterrestrial life are described. The first is an authenticated sighting, the second is any physical object linked to a sighting, and the third is actual contact. The human desire for evidence that we are not alone in the vast universe is in many ways another expression of the human longing for God. We seek an encounter with the source of our existence, its meaning and our destiny.

Jesus is that close encounter, real contact, continuous and active wherever and whenever we surrender to the grace of the moment with faith and love. God is as close to us as our own breath, flesh and blood, for Christ has forever transformed humanity, made all things new by his life, death and resurrection. This is the joy of the Gospel.

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