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“They begged him that they might only touch the tassel on his cloak” (Mark 6:56).

1 Kgs 8:1-7, 9-13; Mark 6:53-56

Like most residents of Kansas City, I watched the large welcome the city gave to the reigning Superbowl champions last week. The Lombardi trophy held high had a special fascination for the crowd and the TV cameras as the parade made its way through downtown. Like other talismans, it was the focus of the team's accomplishment, and its presence in the city for the coming year was celebrated as a sign of pride and good fortune.

That same week, during the impeachment trial in Congress, the U.S. Constitution as idea and object was also revered as the sacred cornerstone of American governance, with opposing sides in the trial claiming that this 230-year old document blessed and validated their arguments.

Today's scripture readings offer similar imagery. The Ark of the Covenant is installed in the temple of Solomon, and its presence in the Holy of Holies is seen as a guarantee of God's favor and as the center of the nation's liturgical life and priestly ministry. Mark elevates the tassel of Jesus' cloak to the status of a sacred source of healing for anyone fortunate enough to touch it.

Each of these examples reminds us that objects are precious and powerful not in themselves but because of the investment of authority and significance given to them by a community. Jesus' cloak was holy because it emanated the presence of God in him, and those who touched it with faith encountered God. Catholic sacramental theology is based on the same belief that certain rituals and physical objects —water, oil, bread and wine— with hands imposed and words said, are intimate contact with Jesus and therefore encounters with God. But without communal faith and participation, as words in books or objects alone, these potent things await activation.

Active faith enlivens the web of spiritual power within the community. How many ministries involve word and touch, face-to-face encounter, hands-on service, heavy lifting in fact and in effect? Sunday Eucharist continues Monday in social engagement, the labors of love that gather the efforts and gifts of the community all week toward the offertory procession to the altar next Sunday. Faith invites us to celebrate the presence of God in the Word, the Eucharist, the presider and in the community, and in all created things. The sacred spills out into the secular, the spirit breathes into every human activity and intention. God is with us and in us.

We ourselves are outward signs filled with grace. As evangelists, we announce the Gospel in every word and action we offer to others. As we begin week ahead, the

Word reminds us that we are salt and light meant to be shared and celebrated. We are temples of the Holy Spirit, houses of worship, signs of God's covenant with the world. Whatever challenges or obstacles we encounter, nothing can take from us the joy of the Gospel.

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